

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project
United States Foreign Assistance Program

An interview with Judy C. Bryson

Interviewed by W. Haven North

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Q: Today is March 13, 1998 and this is an interview with Judy C. Bryson who has served with USAID for how many years?

Career Overview

BRYSON: Ten years, from 1966 to 1976.

Q: What have you been doing since then?

BRYSON: From 1976 until 1992, I worked as a consultant on development projects and did a lot of work for USAID, but also for other international organizations like the World Food Program and the World Bank and consulting companies. Since 1992 I have been working with AFRICARE as the Director for Food for Development. My career in international development really spans the period from 1966 to 1998.

Early years and education

Q: Let's go back to where you grew up, your education and anything that suggests why you became involved in international development.

BRYSON: I was born in Kansas but my family moved to Colorado when I was quite young. We were in various places in Colorado but from 4th grade I lived in Craig, Colorado. It was quite an isolated community, a very small community. At that time there were about 4,000 people in Craig that is in the extreme northwest corner of Colorado. The whole of Moffat country had only 5,000 people in it and it was a very big area. Quite surprisingly, I guess, even remote areas of Colorado have quite an international perspective. In my community there were a number of functions that went on which had an international viewpoint.

Q: Such as?

BRYSON: Every year the Oddfellows and Rebeccas would send a student from the high school on the United Nations Pilgrimage for Youth. You got to go all the way across the United States in buses and visit Washington, DC and the UN. I did that when I was in high school, in between my junior and senior years.

Q: Why did you think you were interested in doing that at the time?

BRYSON: I had made up my mind from about the time I was ten years old that I wanted to do something in the international area. Originally I thought I wanted to be an archeologist but then I had decided that bones and that sort of thing was really not my bag. When I was in high school I was thinking more in terms of journalism, writing and analysis of international affairs. I always belonged to the current events club, etc. and was interested in international things. I competed two years for the UN trip that involved taking examinations and doing speeches about it. It was something I focused on a lot.

When I went to university I studied International Relations.

Q: Where did you go?

BRYSON: I went to the University of Denver. Actually it was my teacher, Robert Dye, who taught current events and contemporary history in my high school and was a graduate of the University of Denver, who told me there were special scholarships because it was the 100th anniversary of the founding of the university. They were having a centennial program involving scholarships which made it possible for me to go there because the University of Denver is a private school and much more expensive than the state schools in Colorado. It had international relations major at the BA level, which I took. Later, towards the end of my time at DU they established the Graduate School of International Studies (GSIS) that is still there. At the time I was there, Josef Korbel, the father of Madelaine Albright, was the dean of the GSIS.

I went there and declared my major as international relations from the first day. I never deviated from that major. I took a lot of courses there. It was an area major, so I also took a lot of courses in economics and political science. I also minored in American History.

Q: What do you mean an area major?

BRYSON: That is not a region of the world; it is just that international relations was something where you had certain core courses that you took in international relations and then you could choose other courses in economics and other related disciplines to make up sufficient courses for your degree.

When I was a senior I learned of the Management Internship Program that required you to take the Civil Service Entrance Exam. You then had to take the Management Internship option that required an oral examination. In that particular year, 1966, USAID took in a very large class of Management Interns. There were 60 people in that class. Half of the people were women, which was also very unusual. The various agencies and the State Department were beginning to feel the effects of the Equal Opportunity Act that was passed in 1963. The Federal Government was to be charged with laws to see to it that there was equal opportunity for women as well as men in employment. Although they were charged with administering these laws, the Federal Government's own house was not in order. So, they were making a very concentrated effort to recruit women to work for USAID and the State Department, specifically.

Joined USAID as a management inter1966

Q: Did you go to graduate school?

BRYSON: I came into USAID with only a BA and that is a bit unusual even at the time I joined.

Q: How did you know about USAID?

BRYSON: I knew about USAID because I had studied the structure of the American Foreign Service and the State Department. Once I had passed the management internship exam, I received lots of offers for jobs from different agencies of the government. As soon as I graduated from college in June 1966, I came to Washington and interviewed with a number of agencies. I was offered the job at USAID and it was obviously exactly in my area of studies, so that was the job that I took. I entered USAID in the government service rather than the foreign service. I started out working on the Korea desk.

Q: Did you have any orientation?

BRYSON: Oh, yes. They gave us a general orientation. I was there with a number of people who did end up having quite long careers with USAID. Lois Richards was in my management intern class, along with Mary Kilgore, Owen Cylke, and Bill Pearson. There was a program that we followed and had various sessions. The idea of the management program was that you were not on the employee roles for two years and you were supposed to rotate every three months to different assignments. I was initially on the Korea desk, which at that time was still a huge program, even as late as 1966. It was a very big program for USAID. The other program that was very large was Vietnam. Asia and Latin America were definitely the areas that you went to if you wanted to be noticed in the agency.

Q: Did you get to choose or were you just assigned?

Transferred to Regional USAID for Africa (RUA) - 1967

BRYSON: I was initially assigned to the Korea desk and it was very interesting. But, I found they really didn't want us to rotate, they wanted us to stay. I really wanted to take advantage of the possibilities of learning and moving around within the agency. I can't remember that personnel did a lot in terms of helping us to find our next rotation. It was kind of up to us. Actually it was Hugo Huginboom, who was on the Korea desk, and, I think, had also worked in the Africa Bureau, who helped me find a position with USAID Regional Bureau for Africa as a second rotation. The guy who was in charge of the Korea desk, or the East Asia office, at that time was John Alexander and he basically told me that if I were going to rotate I would not have a position back on the Korea desk. I would have to be looking for a job somewhere else in the agency. If I stayed, he would be very happy to have me, but he didn't want me to rotate. I decided that I would take my chances and went ahead and rotated.

I actually ended up staying in Regional USAID for Africa (RUA). I didn't rotate again. That meant that I started working in the Africa bureau about January 1967 and with very little deviation, I have worked in Africa ever since.

Q: Do you remember your impressions of the agency at that time?

BRYSON: Well, USAID was spread out all over Washington. There were lots of annexes. I did notice that I had a big comedown from the Korea Desk that was in New State overlooking the Potomac side with the Lincoln Memorial, etc. The Africa bureau was in SA-1, which has since been torn down. It was that building that used to sit on top of the E street expressway and a very run down building. There were not very many windows in it. Later we moved from there to a building that the World Bank now occupies at the corner of Pennsylvania and 18th street. The time period that I spent with RUA was essentially a year starting in January of 1967. I had decided that I wanted to go overseas and did shifts to get an assignment, which I did at the end of 1967. At that point I shifted into the Foreign Service. .

Q: Will you explain what RUA is?

BRYSON: It was a USAID mission that was in Washington. It was basically responsible for all of the former French colonies that had become independent African countries. We had 16 or 19 of the francophone countries in Africa.

Q: Was that an unusual arrangement?

BRYSON: We didn't have very big USAID programs in those countries. There had also been something called the Korry Report at that time which had told USAID that there were ten countries in Africa that had a possibility of developing and that USAID should concentrate on those ten countries. All other countries should receive any US assistance through regional programs. It was quite amazing because USAID had just phased out of all those countries and the pertinent files had been put into boxes and shipped to Washington. There were stacks of these files and programs. But RUA was trying to manage from Washington. The different desk officers for these countries ended up traveling a great deal to Africa in order to keep administering those programs. We also became responsible for a whole bunch of new regional initiatives, like the measles and smallpox program, which was a very, very large program. It was something like \$50 million. We had to get clearances from all the different desks of all the different countries. I actually spent a good deal of my time running around to people's offices getting document clearances.

Q: What was your position?

BRYSON: I was a program assistance working with Val Burati and Peter Daniels. When I first went there I was working more with the Entente countries. Then, when this regional initiative became more and more important, an office was created within RUA for the various regional programs and I moved to that office. Several of the activities we were working with became regional institutions that still exist. For example, one of our activities was the establishment of WARDA, the West African Rice Development Association. Val actually spent a lot of time on that. I was spending more time on another program we were establishing, The African Higher Education Program. I also worked on the measles, smallpox program and those sort of regional initiatives.

Q: This was both Africa-wide as well as francophone Africa?

BRYSON: Yes. RUA was doing all those things. USAID has always had a great deal of difficulty with its survival. I can remember during that period that the agency was pretty much operating almost all the time on Continuing Resolutions. There were times when the Continuing Resolutions ran out. There was one time when everybody in the agency received half a paycheck one day and the other half a couple of days later. Congress had let the Continuing Resolution run out and forced them to do this. It was obviously a very expensive exercise to pay everybody just half his or her wages worldwide and then have to turn around and do the same thing again later.

Obviously at that time the Vietnam War impacted USAID. There was a major part of the agency's budget focused on Vietnam. I had been trying to transfer into the Foreign Service that wasn't that difficult. I really wanted to go overseas. I had also been thinking about going into the Peace Corps because I wanted to go abroad, but decided to stay with USAID. I had gone through training to go to Vietnam and was actually within 12 hours of leaving for Vietnam when the Tet offensive began. I was stopped from proceeding to post along with a number of other people.

My family, I must say, living in Colorado, had never been exactly enthralled with my interest in foreign affairs or living elsewhere and had been extremely concerned when I decided to go to Vietnam and work. But, I had told them that I wasn't going to be out in the provinces but in Saigon and that wasn't a problem. Well, of course, just at the time I was suppose to proceed to post, all of a sudden the whole thing blew up and there were people being shot at and killed in the streets of Saigon. My family was extremely concerned. My parents had been going through some difficulties and I really didn't want to add to their mental stress by going to Vietnam so I made the decision to go back to the Africa Bureau where there was a position in the Development Planning (DP) office. So instead of going to Saigon I shifted back to the civil service and took a position in the DP.

Q: Let's talk a little more about RUA. What was your impression of that kind of operation?

BRYSON: One of the things that became quite obvious was that it was really very difficult for USAID not to be engaged in these countries with a regular program. The American Ambassadors found it very hard not to have a USAID activity going on in the countries and really began to agitate for more USAID activities. The ambassadors are expected to deliver UN votes and to get the African countries lined up behind American interests and positions. The compelling interest in all African countries is development, improving their standard of living. If the American government does not have anything to offer the countries, it was very difficult to get their attention. It is not only a question of offering but really having a material means of expressing the interest of the American people in their country. With an awareness of the standard of living in America, it is hard for these countries to feel they should support US positions when there isn't any material evidence of US concerns. It had started out with closing the missions down and bringing the files back to Washington, but there was obviously a continuing movement to get the missions back.

Q: How did USAID respond?

BRYSON: They began to open missions. There were missions that were reopened in the Cote d'Ivoire and other countries. It started out with an USAID Affairs Officer sitting in the embassy. Gradually the program grew.

Q: But, I thought the rule was that you could not have bilateral programs.

BRYSON: The Korry Report had recommended that they only go to ten countries. I don't think USAID had ever phased down to only ten countries. But, also what was left in various countries began to be added to. It really is extremely hard to manage. I don't know if you interviewed Al Hurt or Henry Petrequine. They were spending almost all of their time in the air to try to cover five or six countries and to make sure that the contracts were right and the development activities were continuing. USAID wasn't really able to discharge its responsibilities with having people only in Washington.

Q: What kind of programs are we talking about with the francophone countries?

BRYSON: We did have some river basin projects that we were working on. There was support to the Entente Council, which was Cote d'Ivoire, Upper Volta (at that time, now Burkina Faso) Niger, Togo and Dahomey (now Benin). We were doing some work in helping them to build institutions and train people. One of the things about the Korry Report was that almost all of the ten countries to be retained were English-speaking countries. There were a lot of problems for Americans working in the French countries because of language. I can remember going to someone in personnel when we were looking to hire a French-speaking water engineer. He said, "Judy, I can't even teach them how to speak English let alone French." I think this is still reflected today. Americans feel more comfortable with the English speaking countries and our programs have always tended to be larger in those countries. Mali may be an exception now.

Q: Were you working on any particular project when you were assigned to RUA?

BRYSON: I was originally with the Entente Council but ended up moving into this other section that they created that Peter Daniels was responsible for. I did do some work within specific Entente countries, but that section became responsible for the regional activities. At that point I was really working more on the measles, smallpox program.

Q: What was your impression of the measles, smallpox program?

BRYSON: At that point it seemed like an impossible dream that they would be able to eliminate smallpox. But, they were successful. One of the things that was a little bit amusing was that they said if you are going to vaccinate everybody against smallpox, as measles is a very serious disease also, and if you are going to get people together, you might as well add measles to the smallpox. That actually escalated the cost of the program incredibly. Had it only included smallpox, it would have been a much less expensive program. Measles require more rigorous vaccination management and adding the costs of the measles dosages meant that it was a much more expensive program.

It was probably something that taught the Americans a lot since people from U.S. Communicable Disease Centers (CDC) were very much involved in going to country after country in Africa. It brought a lot of American health people to awareness of Africa. It gave them an opportunity to learn skills about organizing immunizations under difficult conditions, etc. and probably served us well.

Q: Were there any particular issues that you recall?

BRYSON: What I mainly remember is that it was extremely difficult to get clearances from all the country offices involved. It was both State Department and USAID. I spent a lot of time going round, and round, and round getting clearances.

Q: On what, the project papers?

BRYSON: Yes. On the different action memoranda authorizing the activity and to agree upon what countries were going to be included, etc. There was a great deal of discussion going on as to which countries America was going to support and which countries would be supported by the European countries, etc. The critical thing was you had to end up with total coverage because without total coverage you could get reinfection. That was another thing that took quite a bit of time. It went from something like an \$8 million activity with just smallpox, to being a \$50 million project.

Q: What was the goal with the measles?

BRYSON: I don't think they could eradicate measles, but there was an awareness that measles was an incredible killer of children and that children who were malnourished had a tendency to die of measles. I think there were also a lot of other health problems such as loss of eyesight and that sort of thing, and this was a major public health issue in Africa. Reducing the incidence of measles would pay a lot of dividends in countries where there wasn't a good general curative, preventive health system in place.

Q: Any other aspects of your work in RUA that you would like to mention?

BRYSON: I enjoyed it a lot. They did send me to the early morning French course at the Foreign Service Institute. Although I had French in college, I hadn't learned to speak it very well. I found the training very, very good, although it is extremely difficult to get up at six in the morning to go for class and then go for eight hours of work after that. It was a very fatiguing process.

The other thing I was interested in at that time was that hardly any of the African ambassadors from the French countries sent to Washington spoke English. This made it difficult for them in trying to make their case to the American people.

Q: Did you meet with any of them?

BRYSON: Oh, yes. We met with them but almost always had to have interpreters. That was, of course, the time when you had all the stuff about the ugly American (the book was out), Americans were sent overseas without knowledge of the language or culture and as a result were being hoodwinked. Our mission was being misrepresented and we didn't know it because we didn't know what was being said, etc.

Q: Do you think the RUA operation worked reasonably well?

BRYSON: I think so. It is very hard to have a seven hour time difference and to be trying to fly from Washington to there, etc. I think that is why eventually they decided on the Regional Economic Development Service Offices in Nairobi and Abidjan (REDSOs). At least people were in the same time zone. It is obviously economical to have a regional mission in Washington because you don't have the expense of office buildings abroad and housing for staff.

Q: Do you remember the scale of the program in Francophone Africa at the time?

BRYSON: It wasn't large. I don't think the Africa program was very large. I think I remember it was something like \$50 million per year for the entire continent. I don't think the programs we had were very significant.

Q: What were we trying to do bilaterally in these countries?

BRYSON: I was only involved for a very short time in that and then turned to the regional things.

Q: Let's go on. You moved from there to the Africa Region Development Planning Office?

BRYSON: Yes.

Moved to the Africa Bureau's Development Planning Office 1968

Q: When was that?

BRYSON: That was February 1968.

Q: What was your position there?

BRYSON: I was one of the people liaising with various regions and was responsible for whatever reports had to be put together. One of our major activities was the Congressional Presentation. I worked with the East Africa area...Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Ethiopia and it meant getting in from the various offices their programs, etc.

Q: Do you have any recollection of any of their programs?

BRYSON: I worked quite a bit with the East Africa Union that was still intact. There was a lot of emphasis on regionalism, even in places like Kenya where we had a significant bilateral program. One of the projects had to do with upgrading the railroads. We did quite a bit more with infrastructure. We were building and paving quite large roads in Tanzania. USAID gradually moved out of infrastructure building into development of institutions. I can remember one of the activities was the establishment of the Ethiopian Airlines. TWA had a contract to help establish Ethiopian Airlines. I think we may have been even providing planes, and things like that.

Q: You worked on the Congressional Presentation. What was that all about?

BRYSON: One of the things that we did was to check over documents. You would have a page for each major project. There would be several paragraphs of discussion about the project giving a summary of the different kinds of things that USAID was going to be providing like technical assistance, type of equipment needed, etc. Then there would be a little box that summarized each year of the project and what it was going to cost. You had to make sure that it was all internally consistent. If you said you were going to have 25 person years, it had to come out to a reasonable cost for 25 person years. When you got it all done what was said in the paragraphs was transferred to the tables that added correctly across and down. Then there would be summarizing all of that into tables listing all the projects for a certain country with the hope it all added up. We had to make sure that the whole Africa package added up to the right figure. One of the things that you had to be very careful about was being absolutely accurate and consistent with figures. Anybody with an adding machine can check and make sure you are right. They might not understand all of the concepts and all of the things you are trying to accomplish, but if the figures did not come out correctly that would tend to raise questions about the rest of it. There was always lobbying back and forth about the size of the total budget and everybody's cut of the budget. You would be told you had to cutback in various places. Once you did that you had to make sure the cuts were described consistently all the way through. That could be very difficult.

Q: An important part of the Congressional Presentation was making the justification for the program. What was your understanding of why we were providing assistance to the countries you were working on?

BRYSON: I do think that a lot of the rationale was self-interest. There seemed to be a battle going on; the Cold War was very powerful. The United States had a lot of work to do in maintaining its position in the UN vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. There were quite strong movements among the nonaligned countries as well. A lot of it had to do with delivering votes at the UN. The US involvement in Africa had been absolutely minuscule. In the fifties, even in terms of embassies, American interests in Africa were run out of an office in Paris or London, etc. It was just added on to the responsibilities of somebody residing in another country. There wasn't much involvement. However, as the African nations began to become independent, Ghana being one of the first in 1957 [Sudan became independent in 1956], we began to open embassies and following that USAID programs.

In 1966 when I joined and was working in the Africa bureau, it was still early days for Americans being aware of the African continent and being aware of why we should want to do anything there. Myself, I had always been extremely interested in Africa. A poster that said, "The darkest thing about Africa is our ignorance of the continent," made an impression on me. That really was true and still is true. I know if I talk to people even in 1997 in Virginia where I live now, and I tell them I am going to Africa, they will ask me where am I going to sleep. There really is not a very good understanding that Africa is a continent with a lot of modern cities, etc. Certainly in the sixties there wasn't much understanding.

In the sixties the humanitarian concerns were much more focused on Asia with the starvation in India, etc. It was really not until 1971 with the huge famine in the Sahel and a lot of pictures shown in newspapers and on TV did Americans come to realize that there were severe humanitarian problems in other locations. So, the interest in the sixties was pretty much political self-interest.

Q: Were you aware of any particular USAID development philosophy or strategy?

BRYSON: We felt that many of the African countries were very small and, if they were going to have a critical mass for accomplishing things, then this development of regional institutions was going to be important. There was also the feeling that the colonial era had pretty much carved Africa up according to a whole lot of things that had very little to do with tribal groups, division of peoples, etc. and there would be a number of countries dividing a tribe, i.e. the Ewes are not only in Ghana but also in Togo. It was very difficult to develop cohesive entities around these colonial countries. There was this feeling that regional activities had a better opportunity of assistance. If you had something like a river basin you had to work out the water problems all the way down the basin that often meant you had to deal with six or seven countries. So, this business of developing capacities for communication and for running them was important.

Q: What about sectors? What particular sectors were of importance in our development strategy at that time?

BRYSON: There was a lot more interest in agricultural development than there is currently, if you were to look at USAID programs. There was a growing recognition that food was going to be a problem in Africa and that export crops had been basically what had been emphasized in all of the agricultural research that had been done during the colonial era. The green revolution was beginning to pay dividends in Asia in the sixties and seventies. There was awareness that this was the result of decades and decades of patient agricultural research. Consequently, there was a real need to get started in Africa because agricultural conditions were different.

There was a feeling that American agriculture could be helpful as well as American capacity in doing extension work and that extension was a skill to be transferred. There was a lot of emphasis on various land grant universities in the United States that had major programs in agricultural development. The other thing was institutional development. Institutions that could promote development were a major goal of programs.

Q: Such as?

BRYSON: National development banks. When I began development work in the early seventies in Ghana, I can remember being surprised to discover that various institutions in existence at the time of my arrival had not been created by the British but by the USAID program.

Q: We will return to this but let's stay with DP for the moment. Were there any other aspects of your work there that you would like to comment on? What was the bureau like then?

BRYSON: It is hard for me to remember. I was only there for a very short period from February 1968 until September 1968. I was actually sent for several months in the summer on a TDY assignment to Kenya.

Q: What was that assignment?

BRYSON: Every year a mission had to prepare a country assistance strategy report and it was during the summer that meant a lot of the people who would normally have been there to do that kind of work were on vacation. They sent me out to essentially do this same kind of quality control thing that I had done before.

Q: That was your first trip to Africa?

BRYSON: Yes, it was.

Q: What was your impression?

BRYSON: Oh, I loved it. At that time Nairobi was a much smaller town than it is now. It was mostly unpaved streets, etc. I can remember going out to the game park and being impressed with having all of these animals on the outskirts of a major city. At the end of the time that I was there, I went to Uganda to visit a Peace Corps volunteer friend of mine who was in the north of Uganda. I traveled all around the country. So, later when there was all of the unrest in Uganda I could remember all of these places I had visited. The trains were very nice and functioning well and the hotels were fine. I saw lots of very big animals. It was very colorful and interesting and I had the impression of hugeness. I know Americans don't realize that you can put the continental United States into Africa three times and have space left over.

Q: Did you get any sense of the program there in Kenya?

BRYSON: I worked on the document that covered three countries and the programs that covered all three. There were programs like railroads, airways, the lake, etc.

Q: We were providing a lot of assistance to them?

BRYSON: I don't remember if it was a lot, but we were trying to help support the countries by building the skills and help keep the balance between them. I think they had a common currency at that time.

Q: Did any of those projects make any impression on you?

BRYSON: No, because I didn't get to see them. I was just in the office and pretty much filling in the boxes in Nairobi just the way I was doing in Washington.

Q: Then you left the development planning office in September?

The Impact of a RIF (Reduction-in Force) and the role of women in USAID

BRYSON: No, what happened was as soon as I arrived back in Washington almost immediately USAID made the decision that they had to do a Reduction In Force (RIF). Within a week of getting back I got a letter telling me that I had been RIFed. Hy Nissenbaum, who was the head of development planning, was really upset because he had lost almost all of the people dealing with the various regions. We were a very junior staff. Nelson Denlinger, of the four of us who were there, was the only one who survived and he either bumped me or somebody else because he had been in the army and had enough time to be able to do so. The implications of the reduction in force became apparent to the Africa Bureau that realized that basically they had lost three classes of management interns. All the management interns who had been assigned to positions the previous three years had all been RIFed. These were all the people they had hired and trained at great expense and they had to leave the agency. The bureau made a real effort to try to figure out what to do to not lose all this human capital they had developed. They came to us and said, "Look, we will try to find you any position in the foreign service."

Q: You were civil service at that time?

BRYSON: I was civil service. We were told that if any of us were prepared to go abroad they would try to find out what to do and how to put us into the foreign service. I had already wanted to be in the foreign service so I said that I would do anything.

Even before this happened I had been talking with the management staff in the East Africa Office and had been negotiating to move into the foreign service and go to Ethiopia as a program officer. That was what I was going to try to do that fall once I returned from Kenya. However, the junior Kenya desk officer got RIFed also and they had to put him into that slot in Ethiopia.

Then a job came up in Ghana as the Food for Peace officer. This was something that was totally different. My whole focus in USAID up to that point had really been in the program stream. I had been assistant desk officer and then in the development planning office. I had been expecting if I went to Ethiopia to be in the program office. Food for Peace was something that was really a very different job. My assignment was obviously something that the Ghana mission found very difficult to accept because they had struggled extremely hard to get a Food for Peace officer position established there. They had a very large Title I program there that was selling \$15 million worth of commodities a year. In addition they had Title II food as well, another \$3 million. They wanted a seasoned commodity person but instead Washington sent a cable nominating me. At that point I was 24 years old and had no evidence of any ability in the commodity business at all. Dick Cashin, who was Mission Director at that time, told me later that they swallowed hard but trusted Dave Shear to send someone who could do the job. So, they accepted me.

Q: Who was Dave Shear?

BRYSON: He was the West Africa regional director in Washington.

One thing I would like to say before I go into describing my time Ghana is the situation of women in USAID at that time. They had brought in 30 women in this class of management interns in 1966, and I think as high a number in the class of 1967. This was beginning to readdress the balance between men and women a little bit. There was a huge divide between the new women who were being brought in joined at something like GS-and the women who had been working for USAID for a period. At that time we had the Biographic Register that was published and you could look up different people and see what had happened to them and the track they had taken. You would find these women who were in their mid-thirties or older, who were essentially at the same level as those who had just joined. If you went back and looked in the bio register you would see that these older women actually had academic backgrounds just as good as ours that they had graduated from Brown University with a major in economics, etc. but had come to the State Department or USAID as secretaries. That was the only position at which women could get hired. They had clawed their way up step-by-step through administrative assistant, etc. to finally after ten or twelve years reach the program position. They had had to start at very low levels of government service to get there. Then all of a sudden there is this influx of young women in their mid-twenties who were coming in at the same or even higher level than they had. They did not like us very much. They really had a lot of scars of the battles they had come through.

But, even with that, most of the time it was a very male environment. At almost all meetings that you went to there might be one other woman, if it was a small meeting of ten people or so. Being a woman in the State Department in the professional category was in its infancy at that time. So, it really was something that you had to be conscious of, had to be very careful. I always felt that I didn't blame those women for finding us a threatening group, as we hadn't paid our USAID dues to get where we were.

Q: Was this mostly civil service or both?

BRYSON: What I am talking about at the moment is the few years I spent in Washington. There were far fewer professional women overseas in the foreign service. The image of the Ghana Mission of the person they were going to get as a Food for Peace officer was a man in his late thirties who was going to be well aware of ports and harbors, etc. To find that they were getting a young woman was not to be expected at all. Today when you hear young women say they are not feminists, they don't really realize all the steps women had to go through as recently as the 1960s to hold a professional position.

Q: Were there any special efforts of your group of women to try to change the system at all or press for it, or were each one of you trying to survive in your own situation?

BRYSON: The group of us who joined hung around together quite a bit. We always noticed that we were rather a colorful lot. If you went into the State Department cafeteria, which was a huge room, there were almost all men in sober suits. The older women had survived by looking like the men by wearing very sober suits. But we would have more colorful outfits and definitely stood out.

One thing that I do remember of that time period was the unease within the agency about the Vietnam War and about the efforts of some of us to encourage the beginning of negotiations to end the war. At that time there was a general movement in Washington of civil servants who were going to take out a major advertisement in the "Washington Post" listing all the names of all the people who were essentially saying, "As civil servants of the US government we are calling on the President and the State Department to begin negotiations to end the war in Vietnam." It was determined that civil servants under the Hatch Act could actually sign such a thing. But if you were in the State Department there was another regulation that basically said you were not allowed to take any public stand with respect to any foreign policy issue. However, if you wanted to take a public position or speak before a group, you had to submit what you intended to say to your superiors who would vet it and let you know if it was okay.

The group of us who wanted to sign this advertisement in the paper decided to just write a letter to the Administrator. There were about 50 people within USAID who signed this letter, including me. I was really very impressed with the Administrator because there were a lot of actions he could have taken. He called a meeting and arrived flanked by two lawyers from the Department of State. He came in to tell us that we absolutely could not sign it, it was not allowed. Even writing such a letter to him could have been a problem for us in our personnel evaluations. He had instructed personnel to put nothing in our personnel files about the fact that we had written the letter. Afterwards people started asking if they could do such and such. He felt perhaps they could but immediately the State Department lawyers weighed in saying absolutely not.

What he basically said was that he was not going to give us authorization to sign the petition. However, some people did go ahead and sign it. The ACLU they said would take up their cases if they were fired. But, the agency didn't take any action and just looked the other way.

Q: What about minorities other than women at that time?

BRYSON: It was the same as women professionals, there were very, very few. It was really a white male bastion, the State Department and USAID and the government as a whole. Another impression that you definitely had in Washington was that there were two cities. There was the government city where you had African-American women who were secretaries but they were not in the positions of authority. Then there was the non-government city, the population of which was mostly black who were mostly in the service industries and low level jobs at that time.

Q: Were there any other movements like that in the agency re the Vietnam War?

BRYSON: The effects were felt more later on. There had been a large buildup of USAID personnel in Vietnam but when USAID's role became less and less those people had to be absorbed elsewhere within the agency. Many of them had had quite a long government career and had the prerogative of getting jobs, but their background was really more military than development. It was often hard to accommodate them and find meaningful work for them to do.

Q: Did you have any impression of Congress at that time?

BRYSON: What I do remember is that there was a major change from the Democratic Administration of President Johnson to the Nixon administration. There was a very sharp change. There was a much closer scrutiny of what USAID was doing. There were a lot more reporting requirements.

Q: Was this because they were interested in the idea or because they wanted to get rid of USAID?

BRYSON: In 1968 I think it was more political control. That was also the time when we were having all of the Continuing Resolution business and all the questions about the agency's role in the missions, etc. Eventually, I do think the Nixon administration was really an internationally focused administration and did become supportive in many ways of what USAID was doing. But, just at that point in 1968 when the shift took place, it seemed like there was a major change.

Q: Anything more on this before we leave it?

BRYSON: It was my Washington experience. I'll give it some thought.

Overseas assignment to USAID/Ghana as Food for Peace officer 1968

Q: Your next assignment was to Ghana. Tell us again how you happened to get that assignment?

BRYSON: It was because of the reduction of force in USAID. It was a reduction of force in the civil service and of the more recent employees, the younger people, and a lot of management interns. At that time it was easier to transfer people between the civil service and the foreign service. For those of us who were prepared to go abroad they looked for assignments that would be close to our abilities. In my case I ended up in having pretty much a complete change. One thing I might say is that that was a rather interesting time period just before I left Washington because we were offered quite a number of jobs in the civil service and other parts of the government, etc. I decided that I really did want to go abroad and was happy there was something that forced this move along more quickly.

Q: Why Ghana?

BRYSON: They had just created a position for a Food for Peace officer so there was a slot there and they assigned me to it. I certainly did not have the qualifications that the mission had been expecting. They were expecting someone who had a long background in commodities. I actually arrived in Ghana in October-November 1968 either the exact time or just before people arrived from the Department of Agriculture. They were doing an assessment of the PL480 Title I program in Ghana. At that time it was about \$15 million in sales. There were lots and lots of problems with every aspect of the program - the documentation, Usual Marketing Requirements, commodity mix, getting the program organized properly, etc.

What I can remember of that is that I was very lucky to have arrived just then because it meant that during the very first period that I was in the country I visited every importer of all of the different commodities that we were bringing into the country as well as doing quite a lot of analysis of the markets within which the commodities were used. In almost every case we were providing materials that were being used in Ghanaian industries and there was value added within the country. For example, we were providing wheat that went to the flour mills. We were looking at not only the capacity of the mills to store wheat and to mill it, but also at the marketing chain and the demands in the market.

At that point also, in the whole textile business, we were providing several different cotton products because Ghana was trying to develop a modern textile industry. They had had certain problems. China had been providing them with a very large integrated textile mill that could do everything from spinning, through weaving and printing. The factory was on three boats. I can't remember whether it was one or two of the boats that had already arrived in Ghana and been unloaded when Nkrumah fell. The Chinese decided against continuing with the project after Nkrumah was out and the third boat didn't go to Ghana. Consequently, they had only part of the textile factory but had managed to get the spinning section set up, but they didn't have the weaving section. There were a few other mills that could use a certain amount of thread but their looms couldn't work with what they could spin using the Chinese equipment.

We were also looking at the market within the country for cloth because, though the U.S. government was interested in helping to support the development of industry and the full utilization of industry, it was not wanting to provide excess that would not be utilized within the Ghanaian economy. There was interest in just how much textile the Ghanaian economy could absorb because there was obviously very strong textile interests in the United States that didn't want to be in competition with countries like Ghana.

One of the strongest memories I have of that very first period in Ghana was going down to the main trading division of the United Africa Company, where all of the textiles were in store for sale to the market women. The market women were coming in with their children on their backs and cloth tied around their waists. They were sitting there waiting to talk to the manager of this division, who at that time was British. They would undo these cloths and drop stacks and stacks of money that they were bringing in to pay for the cloth. At that time, the cedi was equal to the dollar. It was obvious that this was an incredibly large operation. The women you would see looked just like any ordinary person. I found out later that many of those women had huge accounts with the main trading division. It was actually a way of hiding what resources they had because they had to have a certain amount of money on deposit to get cloth and they would tell their families that was the amount it was when, in fact, they often had many times more than the amount of cloth they took at any time because they could keep it there.

Q: This was a banking arrangement?

BRYSON: Yes.

Q: What was the situation in Ghana when you arrived?

BRYSON: Nkrumah had been overthrown in 1966 and replaced by a military council. Later there was some kind of attempted coup in which General Kotoka had been killed. At the time I arrived there things had calmed down. The economy, however, consisted of lots and lots of operations similar to the textile factory that had been a huge investment but sort of misplaced. They didn't have everything they needed to make the investment really productive. There was not a great deal available in the shops. Ghana was always sort of strange because it was so obviously an incredibly productive country with its cocoa, gold, etc., but, there was just a lot of trouble in managing all those resources properly and seeing to it that the economy was flowing smoothly and could get the imported items.

At that time there wasn't a tremendous food problem; there were no food shortages. I did quite a lot of analysis of the food marketing, etc. and Accra actually had an area of about 500 miles delivering food there. I talked with many of the people at the United Africa Company, which at one time was the second largest employer in Ghana after the government and was still the principal force in marketing, production in factories and of many kinds of goods. We discussed the whole food marketing system and they said they had found they could not compete with the market women in getting food from these large, long distances to Accra and selling it at a profitable price. The women used a lot of strategies that could not be used by a regular company. For example, their friends would give them food to sell, which they did not have to pay for until after it was sold. The woman trader might do some shopping for these friends in town and bring the goods back to them. There was a whole combination of things involved.

An ordinary, rational, economic operation could not compete with that. What these merchandisers were expressing to me was totally different than the view of the government and much of public opinion. During the entire time I was in Ghana there was this attitude that you found in the press that the public was being ripped off by the market women and those who were buying and selling food. But there was really not a good understanding of the cost of transportation and of retailing, etc. There was a strong view that the price of food should be almost the same in Accra as the price received at the farm gate. That led to the government getting more and more involved in food marketing so that eventually the whole food marketing merchandising system broke down in the 1980s. During the entire period that I spent in Ghana, 1968-76, one could see this continued interference with the market women and a lack of understanding and support for this whole food, wholesaling, retailing operation. During that eight-year period things seemed to go in cycles. Things would sort of settle down and go all right and then you would have a coup. The first one was the National Liberation Council and then that was turned over to a civilian government under Kofia Busia. I was there for that. Then Busia was overthrown and we had another government. It seemed that things would get organized and move along fairly reasonably and then there would a change in government. Most of what I can recall during the period that I was there, was that the problems were largely political that led to different dislocations in the economy and set back development.

Q: Was there competition among the women?

BRYSON: Oh, yes. Each one of them was pretty much an individual proprietor. The markets in Ghana are really fascinating and amazingly developed. At that time the main market in Accra, the Makola market was a very old market consisting of all kinds of alleyways and shops. At that time USAID was actually on the 6th and 7th floors of the Commercial Bank building downtown. My office overlooked this whole panorama of Accra. The side I was on was looking towards the town. You could see all of the markets, etc.

One of the other things I do remember about Ghana, I had come from Washington, D.C. and had always been very concerned about being alone at night on the streets...is that it was much more secure. One experience I had early on was walking down a street and there was this man who was insane who came up and started walking along and talking to me. I was a bit concerned of what he was going to do. This little boy came and walked on the other side and kept saying to me, "Don't worry, he is just a crazy person and he's not going to hurt you. You just walk along." The little boy walked along all the way up the street and then he took the man off somewhere.

Another thing about the Ghanaians is that they have a saying, "A stranger is like a child." So, anything is forgiven people who come from outside cultures. They are not expected to know the right way to do anything. It was very interesting to me that when I first went there practically everywhere I went people would sort of appear and ask me what I was looking for and could they help. You were always being directed around. After awhile I noticed that that had stopped and I realized that they could tell that I knew where I was and what I wanted to do and where I was going. But, as long as one seemed even somewhat confused, people would take it upon themselves to try to help you. They would often spend long periods of time trying to get you to where you wanted to be. It is a very warm country in terms of human relationships.

Q: What was your understanding of why we had a program in Ghana at that time and what kind of program did we have?

BRYSON: The program, if I remember rightly, was around \$4 million a year in technical assistance. Then there were these two very large programs, the Title I program that was delivering about \$15 million worth of agricultural commodities, including, at that time, tobacco, and the Commodity Import Program that was delivering about the same amount. Both of them were essentially balance of payment support to the government. They were allowing for the importation of needed commodities into the market like tires, typewriters under the Commodity Import Program and various agricultural items under the Title I program. Both of these different types of commodities and products were sold and the money was placed into an account that was then transferred to the Ghana government for use in their budget. So, it was both balance of payment support and budget support. Our policy dialogue was on going.

Q: Was this part of the economic reform program with the World Bank and IMF and all that?

BRYSON: I think so. I can remember there were groups who came from the United States like the Harvard Group, that were working on economic analysis. I can remember that Gusto Ranis, the guru of the Ranis model for economic development, etc., came regularly to Ghana for consultations with the government. Fairly early on in the time I was in Ghana I met Patrick, who I eventually married. That placed me in another group of people.

Q: He was working for...?

BRYSON: He was working for the United Africa Company in the business equipment section. I met British people as well as other expatriates and lots of Ghanaians who were not in the government but in the commercial sector. People couldn't quite understand why the Americans were doing what they were doing. There was a lot of appreciation for all the cars, tires, etc., that came stamped with the USAID handshake symbol. Actually the handshake symbol was something people painted all over the place. USAID was always trying to get the local taxi companies not to have the USAID logo on the vehicles but a lot of the vehicles under the Commodity Import Program would come in with the handshake symbol painted on the side, so people would paint it on the side of a Bedford truck, etc. However, they couldn't quite understand what the motivation was. Why was the US government providing this entire largess? I felt that we could have done more by being a little bit more high profile in terms of expressing concern for the average man. This whole business of being involved in balance of payments support and policy dialogue, etc. was sort of invisible. They knew that USAID was occupying two floors of a commercial bank and many people worked there, but couldn't figure out what they all did because the strategy at that time was to try to develop institutions that would be institutions of the country.

Q: Such as?

BRYSON: The National Investment Bank and Agricultural Development Bank were among various institutions that would become the investment arms of the Ghana Government. USAID was constructing the buildings, staffing, training local staff and phasing out the expats, etc. As a result, it wasn't too well articulated for average people why we were there.

P.L. 480 Title I Program

There were two aspects to my job. One was the \$15 million Title I program which was all to do with commercial operations and sales. The other aspect of my job was the Title II program. It was much smaller, about \$3 million a year in commodities that were imported into the country.

Q: Let's stick with Title I for now. What were the principle interests you had to deal with? You have mentioned some. What were the commodities?

BRYSON: One was tobacco that was provided for a cigarette factory. We provided tallow that went to the soap factory. We provided dry milk that was used by Fan Milk Company, which is still operating in Ghana. They used it to make milk products. We provided wheat that went to the flour mills. We provided a range of cotton products. Over the time I was heavily involved in Title I, Ghana did get its textile industry up and operating. When I first arrived the United States largely provided gray cloth, which was unbleached cloth. Later it moved to become yarn and eventually raw cotton that we were providing.

Q: Did you have a sense that this assistance you were providing played a major role in creating a textile industry in Ghana?

BRYSON: Oh, I think it was very important. Cotton cloth is what everyone wears and they had previously to import it. It was a heavy foreign exchange cost for the country. They had lots of interested investors, largely Hong Kong Chinese, who were there working with them.

Q: Do you remember how many mills they were supporting?

BRYSON: There was Akasombo Textiles, Ghana Textile Printing and a couple of others. There were two flour mills at that time. The US government had set up a system that I learned how to deal with which operated very much in the commercial sphere. Essentially we were opening a line of credit for the Ghana government in the United States. The line of credit was nominally in dollar terms but the real decider was the quantity of the commodity that was included in the agreements. The various mills were given import licenses and we advised them what had been purchased for them and they were required to open an irrevocable letter of credit. They had a 180-day payment period that was supported by the bank. There was a fair commercial situation that resulted from this importation because at that time there were certain commercial operations in Ghana but there were still a lot of parastatals which would often get concessional terms and would use those terms to undercut the market causing a problem for the commercial operations. We were trying to avoid that with our Title I program.

However, I can remember that other aid organizations such as the Canadians did not follow this kind of system. There was one period when the Canadians had brought wheat and had not required the flour mills to open an irrevocable letter of credit. I believe all of the wheat got allocated to the state flour mills that were causing a great deal of problems for the commercial mill because they were undercutting the price. The Canadians actually came to me and asked me how we avoided this problem. I said just by treating it as a commercial operation. It really always was a very complicated program.

Q: What were the elements of the complications?

BRYSON: First of all you were trying to understand what the capacities were of all of the mills and figure out the Usual Marketing Requirement. The Ghana Government was supposed to import into the country the average imports that they had imported over the past five years. Our assistance was supposed to be helping them build up capacity. Adding to what had been available before, not replacing what had been imported commercially. However, trying to get figures on importation was extremely difficult. In order to help the Ministry of Finance make these reports they were required to make to the US government we had to figure out all kinds of special arrangements with the statistical office, etc. because that kind of data was not available in any kind of time period that would meet the reporting requirement. Then we had to try to be sure that there would be an absorptive capacity for the output from the factories so that they would be able to pay for their purchases over the period.

Then there was the whole question of how you managed the currencies after the fact, the counterpart funds. There were various different elements to the counterpart funds. At that time we were in a transition from the period when the US government actually accepted payment in local currency for the loan. Then we would reloan the currency to the Ghana government and they would payback in their currency at the interest rate that was the rate at which the US government borrowed money. Sometimes this rate was much higher than the rate at which the Ghana government borrowed money from its own central bank. So, they would not want to borrow the US government money.

We had for a very long period of time something like \$7 million that was sitting in Standard Charter Bank on seven-day call. I don't think we were getting very much interest because it was seven day call. Eventually there was a point reached where the rate at which the US government was borrowing money was lower than the rate at which the Ghana government was borrowing money so the Ghana government wanted to sign the agreements and get access to this money. We signed the agreements and turned over the \$7 million. I can remember the manager of Standard Charter Bank called me up and said, "What is this?" The money had been there for so long that the Bank had gotten used to having \$7 million that it could use. He said, "You might have told me that you guys were going to do this." Anyway, they managed to find the \$7 million somewhere, but I think it was sort of a scramble because seven days was not very much warning.

Q: Do you remember what they used this money for?

BRYSON: I think it was for the agricultural budget for agricultural development, roads, etc. During the time that I was Food for Peace Officer, there was a decision to change to a long-term dollar repayment rather than payment in cedis. I think partially the US government wanted to get out of the business of owning local currency. The dollar repayment was at highly concessional terms. Something like a ten-year grace period and then a thirty-year repayment period with an interest rate at something like 1 percent interest. So, it was about 65 percent concessional or even more than that.

But, because of the concessionality of the agreement, the US government had a stipulation that we would have to agree with the Ghana government on the use of the currency that was generated from the sales of the commodities to the local importers. In a sense that kept the system honest because it meant that there were letters of credit and the money was deposited in a special account in the central bank. We developed a system of the Master Local Currency Agreement which was for both the Commodity Import Program and the Title I currencies. We essentially came up with a positive list of things that the Ghana government could use the money for. Rather than trying to figure out an exact set budget, they could use the money for things that were in their budget that exceeded considerably the amount of currency that was going to be available. Then we could get back from the auditor that at least that much money had been spent on those budget items.

Q: You got out of the local currency business, I believe.

BRYSON: Yes. I think the US had realized the danger of that with India where at one time I think the US government owned more currency than the whole money supply of India. They essentially had to write the money off to keep from causing major dislocations in the economy.

It is one of the interesting aspects of these Title I programs when you get into the monetization part of it. Money management becomes a very interesting thing because it is the currency of the country.

Q: Anything else on the Title I business?

BRYSON: Well, there were all kinds of export prohibitions. The whole process of analyzing all these different aspects, reporting on the usual marketing requirements and assuring that there was no reexport of the commodities, and actually no reexport even if Ghana had value added. We eventually got into a real problem with the textiles because we were importing raw cotton and Ghana wanted to export some finished textiles that were prohibited.

They would have to add to their usual marketing requirement the cotton content equivalent of the textiles that they exported. All of that was a very, very convoluted thing. Eventually, I think around 1972/73, the government decided that Title I was just too constraining on their economy and their freedom of action and wasn't worth the effort that went into it. So, the Title I program came to an end.

Q: Under the Acheampong government?

BRYSON: No, I think it was the Busia Government.

P.L. 480 Title II program

Q: Talk about the Title II program?

BRYSON: When I first arrived in Ghana the Title II program was my responsibility. I must admit that I have always felt that USAID has not paid proper attention to the food commodities over which they had oversight responsibility. At that time there was something like 14 people in the mission who were responsible for various aspects of the \$4 million development assistance program. Then there was the supply advisor, who was responsible for the \$15 million commodity import program. Then there was me who was responsible for both the \$15 million Title I program and the \$3 million Title II program.

Q: How old were you at that time?

BRYSON: When I went there I was 24 years old.

The Title II program was one of the few programs that USAID administered at that time that was very visible. It consisted of food commodities that were being distributed by Church World Service and Catholic Relief Services. The Catholic Relief Services program was much larger than the Church World Service program. The commodities were used for a range of activities. There was quite a large mother/child program where the mothers would come to centers to have their children weighed and to hear a nutrition lecture and sometimes to receive other health services. They would receive food for the child. Then there was also what we call food for work programs. These were used for digging wells and building simple farm to market roads, infrastructure projects of various kinds. I don't think Ghana had much school feeding in the Title II programs that I can remember.

I very much enjoyed getting out and going to the ports, factories and markets, but also enjoyed going around the country visiting the places where the food was distributed. A year or so after I was posted in Ghana, Marty Forman had established the nutrition division in USAID and they had a conference that I came back to Washington to attend. They were looking at trying to enhance the quality of what was being achieved in nutritional terms as a result of USAID programs in general, both development assistance and Title II. I felt a certain amount of tension with the amount of time I had available to work on the Title II program as the Title I program was so all consuming. I felt that these commodities were real resources and just as valuable as money. In many cases they were more valuable than money because money could devalue very rapidly and there was a fixed value to food, particularly in the Ghanaian economy.

I spent one afternoon, when feeling curious, going through the food balance tables of the country looking at what all the effort that we made to get commodities to Ghana really represented. When you looked at it in terms of the total population, it wasn't enough to feed the population for a single day.

Q: Just Title II?

BRYSON: The whole thing. Everything that we were bringing both under Title I and Title II didn't represent anything very significant. I must say I have been hired to analyze various things and to look at this whole question of disincentives, etc. and I never have felt, knowing Africans and African farmers and African women, most of whom are very uncertain that they are going to have sufficient food all year around, that there was ever any question of them not farming as much as they possibly could on the off chance that they might be getting food from one of these programs. To me it never made any sense at all because they would not have stopped. It was not a disincentive to their production.

The other argument that some of these programs might be a disincentive to government taking the policy steps they needed to take to support agriculture might be somewhat more compelling. It certainly was never a disincentive to farmers. There was never dependency on the part of the population because no matter what comes in under these programs, it is very small.

Q: What were we importing at the time?

BRYSON: The wheat and the milk. Under the Title II program I think it was bulgur wheat and corn soya blend. There was always a question about bulgur wheat because it had been developed more for Asia as a rice replacement and Asians hadn't at all accepted it so they always wanted to find out whether or not it was acceptable to the Africans. Actually, the Africans being on a sorghum and millet based diet would soak bulgur wheat and turn it into the same sort of thick paste that they had from other types of grain. They said it tasted a little bit different but they really didn't have any problem with it. It was a very acceptable product in Africa.

One of the times I noticed that these programs could be very helpful was when the government decided to expel all aliens, largely Nigerians, in the country. Very short notice was given. There were a number of transporters who had agreed to take people to Nigeria but actually just took them to the Ghana border and dropped them on the border with Togo. The Togolese who thought they would be overwhelmed with people closed the border. So, you had a situation where thousands and thousands of people were stacking up on the Ghana border with Togo and within a very short period of time the food in the area disappeared. There wasn't enough food for the local population either. There was a terrible problem with sanitation, etc.

I must admit I was very impressed with the Ghana army. They went in and got control of the situation setting up camps, latrines, etc. They asked if we could allocate food from the resources that Church World Service and Catholic Relief Services had in the country available to feed the people while they worked out this problem. I went down to the border early on with representatives of the two agencies and there really was complete chaos. A few days later we were able to allocate food stocks and a major crisis was averted and didn't become a major humanitarian problem. There are times when these food stocks that we had available for the various food programs were able to serve a very useful role.

The other thing that I remember working with donated food stuffs was all of the efforts made by the Ghana USAID mission to encourage the government to admit that it had a food problem in the north during the Sahel drought in the early 1970s. One of the things that had grown out of this interest in nutrition was something called Nutrition Enhancement Grants. We had made a nutrition enhancement grant to Church World Service. There was a woman, Gill Jordon, who was working up in Bawku on nutrition activities. She had done an analysis of the nutrition situation of children and then came up with ways of enhancing the Church World Service nutritional message. She reported to Church World Service that there were severe food shortages and starvation of people in those areas. We heard reports from the Catholic missions in the north who were also distributing food, that similar problems were occurring. We were prepared to make arrangements for the distribution of food or allocation of food and replacement of food into the regular program, but we couldn't do it unless the Ghana government declared an emergency. The Ghana government was not inclined to declare such an emergency. The south of the country was not having such problems. The north was very much less well developed than the south. There was a tendency for the southerners to think the north a very marginal area and didn't want to admit that there was such a problem in the country. I am not sure that they ever did anything very strenuous about dealing with the northern food situation, although they might have towards the end of the problem. We allowed the different agencies to boost their programs through their normal outlets.

Q: Did you have the sense that we responded to the situation or was nothing major done directly?

BRYSON: I don't remember that we did a real major response, but we did do what we could do. We did increase allocations and replaced it. The first time people became aware of the famines in Africa was in the Sahel in 1971. Before that time, pretty much everyone had heard only about the famines in Asia, India and China, etc. The local population of Africans really didn't think there was anything that could be done about the famines, not knowing about the various food programs. They often waited in their villages until they had used up all of their foodstuffs and then they weren't strong enough to do anything and would just starve to death. Further north in the Sahel, people did begin to leave and congregate around the towns and you saw the larger concentrations of drought refugees. It was the beginning of the whole process of people realizing that when these kinds of slow onset disasters occur that maybe there was something that could be done. There did begin to be an international interest and efforts were being made to bring food in to bolster the local food supplies. Later in the seventies and eighties people would leave their farms and homes early on and that is when you begin to see millions of people in drought refugee camps, like in Ethiopia. I do think that that was a function of the population realizing that they weren't necessarily on their own and if they did concentrate close to an urban center, their numbers would result in some sort of response. That in a sense is a bit of empowerment.

Q: Did you find the traditional Title II programs effective?

BRYSON: There has been a very strong attitude concerning the Title II programs that they are welfare, a give away program and that the food commodities had no particular value. But there was also an attitude towards the people receiving the food that was a very paternalistic kind of attitude. This was the attitude towards women receiving food through programs that were called maternal/child health activities. However, at that time there was almost no concern given to the mothers, who were looked at as basically the carrier of the child to the clinic and the food home from the clinic. They were educated about the child's nutrition and told that they were supposed to only feed the food to the child. Much of the way the programs were structured sort of set the mothers up for failure because the amount of food given was not really sufficient to replace the diet of the child. If they only gave that food to the child they probably didn't give other food and it was supposed to be a supplement. Usually the food was consumed by the whole family and if the child wasn't gaining weight, the mother was lectured about it, etc. There has been real progress over time in understanding ways in which these programs need to be changed.

The other thing I always felt about the food for work program is that a lot of times people hadn't visited food for work sites... again the commodities all came in bags that said "Not to be Sold. A gift from the people from the United States." You would have a food for work site and a lot of our concern is to get productivity out of the workers to get durable structures, etc. and with little understanding that if that is what you are doing, that food is a salary. As Americans we would be very upset if someone came along and told us what we could do with our salary. When you see people working in 120-degree temperatures with pickaxes doing road construction you know that this is not a gift when it is being used for a wage for the workers. One of the things that I had a lot of trouble with as a Food for Peace officer was reports of food with "Not to be Sold" appearing in the markets. I can remember one time when a congressman had visited somewhere and had pictures of food being sold. The problem was at that time the World Food Program had a large resettlement program and the food was intended to be sold, but it still came in the same packaging saying, "Not to be sold." The only way I could tell whose food it was, was finding it being sold in a market and checking contract numbers on the bag to see whether it was World Food Program food or World Church Service or Catholic Relief Services food. The only recourse that the private voluntary organizations had was taking people to court if they were selling food that they shouldn't be selling.

It certainly was important that the food not be diverted to commercial interests who managed to get food free. That did cause a lot of problems where legitimately people received food through working for it, etc. There are situations where people could sell, say oil, and get money enough to buy a lot more calories in the form of grain. Allowing them to make those kinds of decisions I think is really important. Otherwise you are downgrading the value of their labor by saying they have to work for the food, but, once you get it, you have to be grateful that you have received it and agree not to sell it. That certainly was always a problem.

The other problem was that while we always wanted to see that child nutrition was improved, or roads constructed, there was no resource other than the food provided to make that happen. The private voluntary organizations didn't have resources enough to get consultants to do the work on the roads, etc. If you look at the normal infrastructure project you will find that the wages of the workers, even where there is a large intensive manual labor component, usually not more than 50 percent of the total cost and usually less. So, the other 65 percent, whatever, of a durable infrastructure project wasn't actually there? Despite this, I have been impressed with what has been accomplished with food resources. In these systems they are often energy short and, if people are going to do self-help building water retention structures, terracing fields, etc., there is a requirement for food for energy for the people to do that. If the food isn't present, it is not possible for them to do it. So, communities often could organize themselves for everything except having enough food for the labor force to do the work. I know there are an awful lot of trees that have been planted and farm to market roads constructed all around the world with these food resources.

Q: Wasn't there a tendency to bring Title II to an end?

BRYSON: Yes, there has always been the feeling of avoiding dependency. You also often hear how America has provided huge amounts of food to the rest of the world and when will we ever be able to get away from this burden. But, people who take that attitude should be aware that in the United States there are billions of dollars spent on all kinds of food subsidy programs. Those programs dwarf in size the amount of resources that go into the Title I, II and III food programs under the Food for Peace. Those billions that we spend on our own population, for the 30 million, is supposedly dealing with a world population where two or three billion people are chronically hungry. I have felt that as we go through this development process there needs to be more understanding that it will take time for government to create sufficient resources to meet those kinds of needs. Even the US government finds it difficult to deal with the relatively small proportion of our population who are food short.

Q: Moving on from the Title II business, you were saying that you had a variety of opportunities in the mission. What were some of the others?

Danfa Health and Family Planning project

BRYSON: I ended up remaining in the Ghana mission for a total of eight years. I was there from 1968-76. During the first time period I was working on the Title I and II programs. Then, at some point, around 1971, it was decided to phase out the Title I program. I continued to do the Title II part of the program and had health and population added to my portfolio. There were some similarities in the population program to things I had been dealing with because we were providing a lot of contraceptive supplies that I had to make sure were distributed properly. By that time, the Danfa Health and Family Planning project had already been established, which was a very large program set up with UCLA the contractor. They were looking at whether or not you got a greater number of acceptors of family planning services if it was a health center contact or mobile teams or up through traditional providers. That was a very involved research design and the University of Ghana was also very much involved with it.

Q: The medical school?

BRYSON: Yes. Working with that program was something that I really found very interesting.

At one time USAID actually had people on its staff that were doing these activities but were moving more into the role of being a contractor of services provided by others. What I remember most about working with that was long, long contract negotiations and budget exercises and trying to keep all of that organized.

Q: So, you were involved in the Danfa project as well?

BRYSON: Yes.

Q: Are you aware of their conclusions or did that come after your time?

BRYSON: The project went on after I left Ghana in 1976.

Q: What was your opinion of the whole concept?

BRYSON: I think the Danfa project had many excellent aspects to it. One of the things that I can remember was going out to the Danfa project site. They had a group of traditional birth attendants graduating. They had been trained through role-playing, etc.

Q: What was unusual about that?

BRYSON: The Ghanaian doctors, who had been educated in British universities or schools outside of Ghana, were constantly telling us that conception would be a taboo subject and how difficult it would be to discuss this sort of thing with societies. At that particular graduation ceremony they had all the chiefs from all of the local area and there was a huge crowd of people. The traditional birth attendants gave this role-play about what they had learned. They had been taught all kinds of things about conception, etc. and were very forthcoming in discussing it. It was obvious to anyone in the audience that they were not at all loath to talk about these subjects in front of all the hierarchy of the local population. I came to the conclusion that the doctors had internalized some sort of problems rather than the local population. The local population was also very aware of the problems when children were born too close together and while there was a great desire to have a large number of children, there was a real opportunity to use family planning methods for child spacing. There was real understanding of the importance of that. In fact, Kwashiorkor is a Ghanaian word which means the disease the first child gets when the second child comes protein calorie malnutrition is what occurs if the child is not old enough when the mother gets pregnant again and has another child.

Q: Were the traditional birth attendants well received by the doctors?

BRYSON: Most children born in rural areas of Ghana were not born in hospitals or health centers. While doctors might have been trained in different circumstances where birth took place, mainly in hospitals, I think the Ghanaian doctors who were involved in this project were mostly wonderful people who were really concerned about children. They knew that the health resources to reach them through the formal system were just very lacking. I think they were very supportive of trying to figure out how they could multiply the possibilities of health services by using the traditional healers and birth attendants.

One thing I was kind of surprised about was that a lot of the traditional birth attendants were men. I found it kind of surprising, because I thought given the separation attitude of status between men and women, they would be women.

Q: Were there any other parts of the Danfa project that stood out in your mind?

BRYSON: It was fairly clear that acceptance of family planning services was much better where there was more comprehensive health services. There were a lot of other things that the Danfa project actually was working on. Things like the efficiency of the health centers. Many of them involved much longer time to get services and medicine than necessary. The system of requisitioning, getting prescriptions, etc. was really not efficient. They made a number of good changes that became models for the operation of health clinics around the country. They also did a very detailed study of polio. There had been a feeling that giving polio vaccine was something that was not necessary. The Danfa study showed that there were significant levels of paralysis and handicapping that resulted from polio.

There has been a gradual recognition that public health, preventive rather than curative, is what is needed, rather than building hospitals and training doctors and nurses. It was very obvious that when people were trained in those ways they wanted to stay in the hospitals to pursue their professional careers meaning there was a concentration of people with those kinds of skills in the centers and not much outreach to the bulk of the population. Things like the Danfa project were helpful in identifying ways that preventative services could reach people.

Q: What other dimensions did you work on in your multi-capacity career?

BRYSON: For a short time I did the Supply Advisor's job.

Q: The Commodity Import Program.

BRYSON: Yes. I also worked for a time with the participants program. We had a variety of programs that provided for instruction in the United States for short and long term periods. There was the whole process of paper work in getting the visas and the program set up, etc.

Q: Do you have any feelings about that program or anything significant about it?

BRYSON: I really didn't do it for long enough. There had been a tendency to do more short courses, upgrading people who were already launched in their careers, because USAID had found that if they sent people for long term education in the United States it was very difficult to get them to return to positions in their countries. We were sending nurses to the United States for specialized training, partly in family planning.

Q: What about the family planning situation in Ghana? Was it working?

BRYSON: The Ghana government was one of the first governments to have a population policy. Having such a policy had a lot to do with USAID which had done a lot of work in conferences, talking about the implication of rapid population growth, the impact upon development, etc. They framed the discussion in terms of trying to achieve a better standard of living for the population and that having children every two years from age 14 to 44 with many children dying was a very heartbreaking drain on families.

Q: How did the program work? Was it getting anywhere?

BRYSON: The number of people practicing contraception was pretty small and was largely the educated people and women who had jobs and education. I can remember that my steward's wife was having another baby every year and was telling me how tired she was and all the problems she was having. I said, "Why don't you go to the family planning clinic?" She said, "Oh, they kill people there." That was what she had gathered. Just like in the United States it took a fairly substantial period of time for acceptance to reach 20 percent or so of the population accepting it. Once it got to that level it sort of switched over. At that time in Ghana it was very much still a limited number of people. But, I think Ghana is one of the countries now in Africa that has a rather high prevalence of contraceptive use and a falling fertility rate. This is probably a result of the significant amount of early work in the country, but also the Ghanaians as a whole, both men and women, have a high education rate amongst countries on the continent.

Women in Development

Q: What else did you work on?

BRYSON: I became involved in quite a significant initiative in the area of women and development during the last years I was in Ghana. The Percy amendment to the foreign assistance act came out in 1974 or 1975. It basically said that we had to give assistance in a manner that served to enhance the status of women and increased their contribution to economic development. That was the early form of the amendment. Later it got changed a little bit because some people thought it was using women to increase economic development rather than the improvement in their status and economic conditions.

In general in USAID there was an attitude that we were already doing that. Quite often we were sending significant numbers of women for training in nursing, etc. and there were all the internal programs for child health and we were in compliance.

Q: What did you think?

BRYSON: As you know there was a group of women in Ghana, including your wife (Jeanne Foote North) and Charlotte Blumenthal, the wife of one of the USAID officers and Marian Fuch-Carsh, who was the wife of the agricultural economist we had in the mission, who when this came out basically felt that we ought to really analyze the situation and determine whether it was so.

Q: What was so?

BRYSON: Whether it was true that the USAID program was already in compliance with the requirements of the Percy amendment. The paper we produced in April 1975 was, I think, one of the first studies that were done by USAID. I did come back, along with Jeanne North, to a conference in the United States on women in development. I don't remember if the conference was before or after we did the study. We actually looked at the whole range of things that women were doing.

Q: Such as?

BRYSON: Women traders, for instance. It was very apparent that women did have a strong role in buying and selling of goods. We also looked at women who were in wage employment, involved in farming, what they were doing in the health field as well as voluntary work of women. Basically what the study showed was that in many areas the USAID program was not in compliance with the act.

Q: What does it mean to be in compliance?

BRYSON: That USAID was given in a manner to enhance the status of women and increase their contribution to economic development. An important area that had not really been dealt with was agriculture. Americans were very used to the idea of the farmer and his wife. The wife might do some things in agriculture but she didn't have any real decision making role and was more involved in cooking and keeping the farm hands. Actually African women have significant roles in crop production. On the family fields there are certain portions of the agricultural production cycle that women are almost totally responsible for. All over Africa where USAID had been working to establish government extensions we had largely created American model extension services with large numbers of male agents who were trained in all of the techniques of improving agriculture. There were generally a very small number of women who would be in agriculture, and they usually were in something called the home economics service that was interested in improving food processing, cooking and those aspects. Sometimes they might get involved a little bit in horticulture and gardening and maybe some small animal raising, but it certainly wasn't either significant in the numbers or in the functions that they were trained in, and the level they were trained in real agricultural understanding. What we became aware of was that male extension agents would not go out and speak with women farmers. It just didn't happen. Instead, they would talk to the husband. The things they were trying to transfer, as techniques were to do with portions of the production activities that men didn't have any involvement with and often didn't really understand. Therefore, they wouldn't know what questions to ask and the likelihood that they would be passing that information along to their wife was small. So, there was a lot of wasted effort.

Q: Was the Ghanaian society supportive or not?

BRYSON: Ghanaian society was very variable. Among Africans it depended a lot on whether you were dealing with a patrilineal society or a matrilineal society. In the matrilineal society the women remained together with their families. Husbands often lived with their families but would come and spend time with their wives. The wife had her family around her that often provided her with a little more authority in those cultures. There were patrilineal societies where women would leave their family and go and live in the family of the husband. In those cultural arrangements the women had less support and authority.

Q: Did you have both of those in Ghana?

BRYSON: Yes, both types. The Akans are matrilineal and that was one of the largest and most powerful groups in the country. The Gas, the Ewes and the people in the north tended to be patrilineal. So, you had a variety of situations. The complexity of the society in Ghana was not well recognized. Also, because women did not speak in public whatever role they had in decision-making was often not understood and not supported. But, actually women did have very important roles in decision making in the family. For instance, the queen mother of Ashanti has a lot of political roles too, but they are not as visible. So, by focusing on educating men, we were often overlooking those roles and creating a situation where women's position was undermined.

One of the things that I would say about African women from the years that I have worked in Africa is that despite what outsiders think, women are very strong personalities and are quite capable of reasserting their position that has been undermined by policy. But it isn't efficient for development. It is far better if there is careful attention to the roles of women. One of the very important things that I think needs to be recognized is that in African families in general there are different economic strategies that are pursued by all adult members of the household. Those different economic strategies and economic responsibilities for things is a means of risk aversion, a strategy for dealing with the risk that families face. Essentially the hope is that not everybody's strategy would fail at the same time. While the husband may be pursuing a business in trucking, the wife works on the peanut fields somewhere else hoping to earn enough to carry them through in the event the husband's truck is wrecked and the business fails. So to promote the safety nets of households it is really important to promote economic progress at all levels.

Another thing that wasn't really well understood was that an awful lot of employment and income earning of families was involved in women's roles of food processing and marketing - the whole trader function. Often governments tried to take over parts of that with food marketing boards, etc. These were not efficient and had a very negative impact upon families and the marketing. In Ghana there was a lot of state enterprises for canning which were not very economically viable. A lot of it was because they were trying to centralize it. Strategies to upgrade the existing food processing activities were really important. In 1990, 50 percent of the employment in the rural areas actually involved women in food processing activities. It is a very important sector of the economy that still hasn't gotten the kind of support that it needs.

Q: What were the conclusions of your report on USAID's compliance?

BRYSON: There were some things that we were doing right. I actually spent the last year that I spent in Ghana as the evaluation officer in the mission. We went through systematically project-by-project. I determined whether or not things could be done to a program to make it more supportive of women and to meet the requirements better. I had a struggle with the agriculture people. At that time we had the MIDAS (Managed Input Delivery of Agricultural Services) project. One of the areas that we decided on eventually to deal more with was this small home economic section of the Ministry of Agriculture. We upgraded some of the training of some of the women in that service and expanded the kinds of activities they did so that they could reach women. We were also doing things like trying to encourage extension agents to have both male and female agents on the teams. The agricultural section was not very enthusiastic about that. But I did meet one of the officers a long time later in Lesotho, and he told me he had gone back and looked at the evaluation of the MIDAS project and had found that actually those aspects where we had tried to enhance services to women farmers had actually been some of the most successful portions of the project. So, over time there was a change in attitude. The officer was working with USAID on this very large design in Lesotho - Lesotho Agricultural Production and Institutional Support project. I was doing a social analysis of that and he was very supportive of the kind of suggestions that I made in the design of that for making sure the project reached women. So, the agency definitely did evolve in trying to enhance these areas.

Q: Were there other initiatives that came out of this?

BRYSON: We did decide that there should be actual women in development project. The first step was looking at our existing program. We felt there were areas that needed to be addressed and couldn't be accommodated within the existing projects. Therefore, I worked on the design of a project. It had two aspects to it. Part of it was a research grant to look at and develop more information on various aspects of the situation of women. The other part of it was support to the Ghana Assembly of Women, which consisted of voluntary groups like the YWCA, the Girl Scouts and other women's groups. There was a commission that was established by the government. The Percy amendment was I think somewhat in response to the UN declaring the decade of women. One of the things that I have always been aware of was the lack of women from the developed world and certainly African women who could never agree with the concept of equality. They were very clear that man did not equal woman. Generally, they have an understanding and awareness of their personal worth and the worth of what they do. They were not interested in equality. So, all of the rhetoric that is around equality they do not respond to at all. What they really want is the right resources. They want help to learn more and have the credit that they need to improve the functioning of their enterprises on an equal basis. There have been a lot of problems with laws in Africa, many of which were derived from European codes that overlooked women's property rights. That sort of thing has needed to be corrected over time.

Q: What was the project with the Ghana Assembly of Women? Do you remember what you did?

BRYSON: One of the things that I did was manage to get help from a group in the country that was involved in working with various government departments training executives in order to improve their management. We managed to get them to facilitate a conference for the Ghana Assembly of Women to kind of do action-planning exercises and identify goals that would get them there. That was one of the activities that we set into the design of the program because the support grew out of that exercise. We tried to make it something that was participatory, which might have been a bit early.

Q: How do you characterize the Ghanaian women that you worked with both inside and outside the government?

BRYSON: That is another one of the things about African women. If the family had the resources to see that the women were educated and could pass the tests for a government position, they could rise within the government. In particular, I worked a great deal with Mary Chinery-Hesse, who when I first went to Ghana was responsible for the American programs in the Ministry of Finance. She actually was the person that I traveled with a great deal because she went with me to visit all the factories, the ports and harbors. In fact, my husband told me that one of the British businessman from Unilever (the soap factory) told him that the first time Judy and Mary came to visit them they thought this would be no problem because what could two women do? But we learned that they were very precise. Mary was really an excellent person to work with. She went on to be both Minister of Finance and Minister of Plan in later governments, after I left the country. She became the deputy secretary general of the ILO [now retired]. And, there were many other women in various governments departments in ministries in places like finance that was a very critical high profile powerful ministry and you found women in those roles.

We also had an American-Ghanaian Women's discussion group that met. Different members of the group would prepare short papers on whatever the situation of women was in the United States in a particular sector or about different aspects of life. The one I can really remember which was very enlightening was where we began talking about joint accounts. Some of the American women who were wives of employees and not working themselves, were talking about how difficult they found it because they couldn't buy a present for their husband without his knowing because the bank accounts, the credit accounts, always came back. The Ghanaian women were absolutely flabbergasted. They could not even conceive a situation where they would have a joint account with their husband. Their financial activities were totally divorced. They always kept their account separate.

I think the women in development initiative was probably a good one because it began to require reflection on the differences between cultures, in the roles and the division between the sexes because there really had been a tendency to think that the way we divided labor was the right one, the most efficient one and other countries needed to do it the way we had done it. There actually were very good social and economic reasons for the division of labor to be different in other cultures and we needed to understand that to really be able to be supportive of development and efficient in our USAID giving.

Observations on eight years in Ghana

Q: Were there other facets to your work that you took on during the eight years in Ghana?

BRYSON: I think we have covered pretty much the gamut.

Q: Eight years is a long time. How do you view that whole time in terms of contributing to the development of Ghana, and what worked and what didn't work, etc.?

BRYSON: I think it is very, very important in development to take a long perspective. In the short time in Ghana it could be very demoralizing. You could work very hard on building something up and see it going in the right direction and then there would be a coup, or reshuffling of the cabinet, and a lack of interest.

I must admit that I was very, very distressed by the continuing attitude towards the food marketing situation and the way in which the government tried to apply their experience with the Cocoa Marketing Board and other export crops to the marketing of food crops. An individual farmer really did not get that much money out of food crop marketing and they were totally turned off by the getting of chits from the Cocoa Marketing Board. But, because cocoa was a relatively important part of their income, they could work with that a little bit more or smuggle cocoa over the border. They wouldn't stop producing. But, when it came to marketing through government marketing boards for food crops, they stopped. Eventually, during the early eighties, it came to a head in Ghana. In the early period of the Rawlings administration there was almost a concentrated attack on the market women. The army went in and totally dynamited the main market and many of the market women were tortured and arrested. As a result, the food marketing chain essentially collapsed.

There was a time in Ghana when prices were so high that the workers in Accra would have to work several days to buy enough food for a single day. That was a total reversal of the situation that the workers in Accra had had fifteen years before. So, it was really hard to see progress. Everyone seemed to be trying very hard to go backwards.

But, what I strongly believe is that the perspective we have to take on these situations is one of recognizing that it is not really possible for an outside force, such as the colonials were, to prepare a country for independence. When a country becomes independent and people start making their own decisions about how their economy is going to be run, how their government is going to be run, schools are going to be run, that is day one for a lot of the movement forward. If you look at the United States fifteen or thirty years after we received our independence from Britain there was very limited franchise of people. There was a very limited portion of the population that was reaping the benefits of the economy. It is something that really takes time and the African continent was really in a very poor position in the development process because they are the latest industrializing states. While changing from agriculture to a more modern economy, they faced a world that was already industrialized. They were also in a situation where their place in the world economy was mostly as a source of raw materials. It really takes time to work things through. There are a high proportion of African societies that make decisions almost by consensus. There is a long process of discussion and working things through with people finally coming to a group decision. Therefore it takes a very, very long time to begin to get some of these new processes established.

Q: Did you find this true in Ghana?

BRYSON: Yes. One of the things I noticed in Ghana and later in other African countries was that as you are going out into the rural communities you often see huge groups of people meeting in a large circle with usually the men in the center and then the women are around the outside. The community is discussing something that they consider to be of importance and essentially bring everybody into the process of discussing it. I did notice it in some groups that I belonged to in Ghana. For a while we had an employees' social group that was both Ghanaian and American staff of the mission. Planning something like a Christmas party took a long time because you would just talk and talk and talk about every aspect of what you were doing. So, I think it is really important that we recognize that these cultures have had to adapt models of governments and economies to make them meaningful within their own context and that is a process that takes time.

Q: Were there other aspects of your eight years in Ghana?

BRYSON: I think the reason I ended up spending such a long time in Ghana is an interesting aspect, and it also is illustrative of the way personnel policy within the agency has changed over time. When I started in USAID, women who married basically had to resign or at least had to ask for permission to marry. The process of asking permission to marry consisted of simultaneously putting in your request for permission and your resignation, so if they decided not to give you permission to marry and remain in the service they accepted your resignation. So, it was obviously a major step to think about asking to marry because you didn't know what was going to happen.

The other thing, which automatically happened to women in the foreign service, was that the assumption was you were no longer available for worldwide assignment. There was a special category within the foreign service that was called foreign service reserve resident. You actually remained with your class, and was paneled and promoted along with everyone else within your grade, but you didn't get certain benefits. If you weren't available for worldwide assignment, you didn't get home leave, you didn't get differential, and you didn't get a residence. Though I received medical services from the American embassy and when I had children they received medical services, but my husband did not. This was a difference from the female spouses of foreign service officers. Men were not required to become resident staff and obviously their spouses were not treated in this way.

I decided to marry early in 1970. This was just after this policy of being allowed to become resident staff had come into place. But, I still had to request permission to marry and because my husband was a British citizen he had to have a security clearance, etc. The mission, who was very supportive of my getting all of the clearances and being allowed to marry, was not moving to replace me. This process started in January, I was getting married in June. We finally got down to the point that all the invitations had been printed and I was getting married in two weeks and still had not received any advice as to whether it was all right for me to get married. It was a very difficult thing for the mission because they didn't know whether the individual who was responsible for one of the important programs in the mission would be stopping two weeks after that. Actually, the administrative officer called me the morning of the day I was getting married and told me that the cable had finally come in saying it was okay. So, it was really quite a cliffhanger. This then meant that I stayed in Ghana and continued to work in Ghana.

In 1974 USAID changed the policy and said that they would restore me to full officer status and give me back differential to the time when I got married, but I would have to return to the United States so my husband could become an American citizen. By that time I had one child. I decided not to accept the offer but they allowed me to stay as a foreign service reserve resident. That meant that when we came to the point where my husband was going to be leaving Ghana, where he had been working for a British trading company, and returning back to England, we had the decision about what to do. Whether he would stop or I would stop or whatever. At that point I was having a second child and really didn't feel I wanted to become the principal breadwinner in the family, so I resigned from USAID.

Q: When was that?

BRYSON: In August 1976. I had joined in September 1966, so I worked for USAID basically ten years.

Observations on USAID development policy

Q: During the period you were with USAID what was your understanding of its development policy or strategy and it's changing?

BRYSON: Through all of that period the Vietnam War impacted USAID. We did not leave Vietnam until 1975. A lot of the agency's resources and attention was focused on Vietnam and Asia and the problems there. Also, it did very much effect the way in which other countries viewed the agency. We seemed to have a very operational role in the conducting of the war and supporting the development of one side. There was suspicion that USAID was just another instrument of American control. I think that was a problem.

The Nixon administration, however, did have a very international perspective, and there was a lot of support given to USAID while earlier and later administrations had not provided quite so much. It was interesting that the editorials in Ghanaian newspapers during the whole Watergate period indicated that the government of Ghana felt it would not be a good thing if Nixon left the presidency because they felt he did have a very international perspective and they were concerned the US would turn inward.

There was also an effort to create a separate agency. USAID had been part of the State Department and there was a new law that created IDCA (International Development Cooperation Agency). I can't remember very much about that. I know that Hubert Humphrey spent a lot of time on that and was very supportive of trying to create a little more autonomy for USAID. It had a lot to do with wanting to separate USAID from essentially the American foreign policy interests and to have it be a little bit more focused on promoting economic development rather than American foreign policy.

Q: When you were there in the beginning you talked about Title I, commodity import programs, economic reform relationships, but that changed didn't it to the basic human needs? Do you remember that transition?

BRYSON: Yes. The basic needs policy actually was after I left USAID. In the fall of 1978 I went back to university, the University of Manchester, to do a masters degree in economic development. There were various theories and philosophies of development. There was also just the first research being done and talk on basic human needs, during that period, 1978-80.

Q: But, we had started changing the program in the mid seventies.

BRYSON: Yes, in things like the movement from supporting the central banks and agricultural loans, etc. to the kind of thing that was happening with the MIDAS project where we really were trying to improve the operational outreach and support of what people were doing. And, that was backed up theoretically by all the analysis that was done. The World Bank, which had also been primarily concerned with infrastructure projects and building roads and bridges, etc., started to take on basic human needs analysis also. They were indicating that the best returns came from education, health services, etc., which really did begin to change the agency's approach.

The economists had basically been in control or certainly had a very powerful voice in everything the agency was doing. There was an evolution of interest in sociologists and anthropologists and some of the other more soft human studies. We begin to see in the projects instead of just looking at the cost benefits of what we were doing, a technical analysis that included a social analysis to see if it really was socially as well as economically feasible to undertake a certain activity.

Retired from USAID -Graduate School and Assignments as Consultant-1976

Q: Let's have an overview of what you did since you left Ghana and resigned from USAID.

BRYSON: When I left Ghana initially I did about eighteen months as a stay-at-home mother. Then I started to work as a consultant. The first consultancy that I did started in the spring of 1978. It was to prepare women in national development study for Cameroon. They wanted a very comprehensive study done and there were people in the USAID mission familiar with the work I had done in Ghana and they were looking for people who had some experience in this. There weren't all that many people who worked with this in those days. We really laid out a very comprehensive study. I identified the five ethnic groups that made up 80 percent of the population and studied what they were doing in those groups and collected what information could be found on the modern situation, women in employment, etc.

Q: You did this by yourself?

BRYSON: I did it all by myself. It required my making two trips to Cameroon. The USAID mission had the impression that there wasn't very much information available. However, I found that once I started looking specifically for information, it wasn't available in the libraries in Cameroon, but in going to the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, and ORSTOM in Paris, I found many studies that had been done. The French anthropologists actually do a lot of participatory analysis, and I found that there were one or two studies that had been done of most of the major groups that involved people who essentially lived in the communities and had time to see what people were doing. They figured out how many days were spent in agriculture, etc. This made it quite easy to find the data. Of course, it was all in French that certainly helped my French ability. I did the initial analysis and produced a draft report after my first visit. Then I went back to Cameroon with it and met with people again and went over the whole report and discussed it. I went back to England and finalized the report. That was still in the days before word processors, etc. so the whole thing had to be typed straight through. It was really quite a big production.

Q: Did anything particular stand out in this report?

BRYSON: There were big variations between women's situation in the different ethnic groups. The women in the north, the Fulani women, even though they were ostensibly an Islamic society, had very definite things that they owned and things that they did, the milking of cows and selling milk, etc. One of the things I did find very interesting was that the Bamileke society was supposedly a patrilineal society with the men owning land. However, the actual right to use land was inherited by women. The husband, having the right to farm, depended upon the usage rights that his wife had accumulated. It was another example that women's roles in society and in the terms of the potential for production, are often overlooked by us when we look only at the surface of a society rather than what is actually happening.

The other thing that was quite clear to me in doing this was why the young men migrate to the cities. Many people talked about it, blaming it on the role of women in agriculture. A variation on the theme if women would just go back to the homes than male unemployment wouldn't exist in the United States, that sort of thing. Polygamy was a very big factor in Cameroon. Because the number of men and the number of women is roughly equal, the only way that men could have several wives was by making the age at first marriage for men generally about 30 and women 15, so that the men who were able to marry had a much larger pool of women available to marry. When you looked at this culture, land was not really allocated to single people. Land was allocated for farming. So the young men 18-30, or whatever, were just in the father's household and as long as they remained there they might give them a small plot that they could farm to earn a little bit of money on their own but they had to do basically what their father told them to do. Also they were dependent on their father to come up with enough money for them to pay the bride price for the wives. Generally, most of the young men were not interested in that and went into the cities to try to earn enough money on their own to be able to marry. Once they were married they could get land. So, the talk about it being the women's role in agriculture that was sending young men to the cities was not correct.

Q: If you had many wives, you had lots of land then.

BRYSON: Yes, you would often be allocated land for each wife. It was only among the Bamileke that women had usage rights; generally elsewhere it went through the male line. However, you had to be a family to have the use of land for farming.

The other thing that was really clear to me was that given the real responsibilities that women had in agriculture and the amount of work that they did in agriculture, even if all of the young men had returned from the cities, women would not be able to leave agriculture because there simply would not have been enough labor available to do it.

It also became clear to me in the course of doing that study that in the vast majority of societies in Africa, there is a very close correspondence between the real importance of women as mother and having children and growing the food to feed children. The whole complex of activities there is seen as the feminine role. The growing of food for children, preparing food for children, preparing food for the family, having children, it was all part of what it means to be female. So, again you would not have the men moving in and taking over those roles because it is not seen as a male role. If we really wanted to do anything with respect to food crops in the majority of the societies, we really did have to pay attention to women. We had to pay attention to what kind of channels of communication you could use to reach women. In many cases, you could not do that through the typical extension services, which were largely male, unless you had women in groups and made other kinds of arrangements.

Q: What did you recommend to the mission in your report?

BRYSON: I don't know precisely what the mission did with the report. I know that they reproduced originally three or four hundred copies and all of those were taken and they had to do another round.

Q: In Cameroon or outside?

BRYSON: Well, women in development here reproduced it. I have been surprised over the years as I was doing various things to come upon it in various bibliographies. I went to work at the World Bank about a decade later and found that they were using it on stuff they were doing on Cameroon. It was a very comprehensive analysis. What the mission was really wanting was to know what the situation was. I think they probably planned to do something similar to what was done in Ghana, using this information to determine whether or not their programs were meeting the requirements in the women and development amendment.

In the middle of this study, I started to do my masters degree in economic development at Manchester. My master's thesis was on the development implications of female involvement in agriculture, the case of Cameroon and used some of the study's information. I was working on economic models, the two-sector agriculture/industry model and how you can squeeze agriculture to build the industry, etc. and the kind of implications you had when the labor you had in agriculture was largely female and the industrial sector you were building was largely male. After I finished at Manchester, I rewrote a much shorter version of the study, and it appeared in a special edition of African Women and Development in a journal published by Oxford University.

One other thing I do remember was some years later I ran into an African woman who worked for the Tanzanian mission and she told me that she had read my book and was very, very surprised that an American woman could actually understand African women so well. There is a real dichotomy between this question of equality, that the African women are not interested in equality. They are very definite that woman does not equal man, but in fact, in most cases I think they have a feeling that they are somewhere above. But, in any case, they see themselves as different. Also, I think in a lot of radical feminism verbiage there is really a tendency to denigrate some of the traditional roles of women. That is not at all acceptable to African women. What they want is support and resources so that they can accomplish their traditional roles better, so they can raise their children better, etc. So, some of this rhetoric is not acceptable to them. I would say that I am definitely a feminist myself in the dictionary sense of feminism.

Q: What is the dictionary sense?

BRYSON: Supporting the female. It is like liberalism and has become a pejorative term. If you really look at what the true definition of the words are, they are not pejorative or negative. In fact, I do tend to agree that whatever women's choices are they are valid, whether the choice is to stay at home with children or the choice is to try to work out something else. When the pressure is really in one direction or the other it is not really being helpful to women. It tends to take the energy away from trying to solve the real problems that women do have.

Back to school for a degree in economic development 1979

When I decided to go back to school for a masters degree, I first thought about doing a masters in business administration and seeing if I could become relevant in working in the UK. But I decided that I already had ten years working in Africa development, and as the first world countries had plenty of people who were working very hard to improve their economies, I should really continue to do what I had done and build on what I already knew. Consequently, I made the decision to do a masters degree in economic development. Of course, that decision meant that any work I was going to do I was going to have to leave home and go to Africa to do it.

In my studies I took a number of courses that actually allowed me to do cost-benefit analysis and that sort of thing that I had not really known how to do prior to going back to school. I finished my course work in the summer of 1979 and started then actually working on a number of cost-benefit analyses and also some of the social analyses for our program in Burundi. There was a colleague I had known from Washington days and also in Cameroon, who was in the Burundi office. They were very much concerned whom they might have come to Burundi five years after a major uprising. It was a very sensitive situation, and they were concerned that people might get themselves in hot water unless they were a known quantity. Once I started doing the work, they also didn't want to introduce very many new faces into Burundi, so I actually worked on the road program and the design of the Peat project. They had me come back and do the mid-term evaluation of both of those programs also. There were about 13 people on the design for the Peat project.

A peat project in Burundi

Q: What was the Peat project about?

BRYSON: In Rwanda and Burundi because of the combination of the high altitude and the tropical location you have conditions for the production of peat. Most peat that you find is in much more northern latitudes because of the temperature required for making peat. It is a fuel that is available in the bogs of Burundi and Rwanda. It also is a fuel that has a burning profile that is very good for cooking beans, the primary food in those two countries. With a heavy population there was almost no tree cover left in the country, and there was concern that if they continued to use charcoal as the primary fuel in the urban areas they would be running up against a total shortfall.

This is one of the things that I would really like to go back and look at because I don't know what happened. I felt that they were making a number of mistakes in the way that they were approaching the program. People who were hired to work on marketing strategies were approaching it more from getting industries to use peat. That might be useful but the industries were only a minor problem. The major problem was household use. They were taking on the charcoal dealers rather than cooperating with them. They needed to bring the charcoal dealers in and have them add this product to their range and work on more of those kinds of problems. The fuel really did have a lot of major benefits for women in that you could set it up and put the pot on the burner and leave it all day. You didn't have to worry about feeding the fire all day like you did if you were cooking beans on charcoal or on wood. A peat fire would last a very long time.

I gather that the army became the principal consumer of the peat. Some people feel that that means the program was a failure, but I don't agree. I think the purpose was to avoid wood usage and help to preserve more wood. If anybody was going to be able to get as much fuel as they needed to keep themselves warm, it was the army. They had the manpower to go out and cut down the trees. So, if instead they were using the peat and leaving the environment alone, I think that was probably very useful. I think there needed to be more attention to consumers and they needed people who understood social marketing and that sort of thing. Social marketing came along sometime after 1980 when the peat program started.

Q: USAID was supporting the project?

BRYSON: It was an USAID project. It originally had been started by CRS (Catholic Relief Service) on a very small scale using food-for-work to have people cut peat in the bogs, etc. Actually it was a joint activity of the Irish Peat Board and USAID. The Irish Peat Board was providing the technical assistance concerning the cutting, stacking and handling of peat.

Q: USAID was working on the marketing side?

BRYSON: USAID was paying the bill. The Irish Peat Board people were seconded to the project.

A road project in Burundi

I was really very pleased to work on the design of the program and then to have the opportunity to go back and look at the mid-term evaluation because you really could see what a tremendous impact road access could have in an area where there was potential for coffee production, growing of bananas, etc. which were products heavily in demand.

Q: This was in an area where there had been no roads?

BRYSON: There was a road that had been built during the Belgian colonial period in this area, but right in the middle of this road there was a bridge that had fallen into disrepair. If you wanted to go around to look at the other side of the road, like we did in the pre-design stage, you had to drive 180 kms from Bujumbura around. To get by road from this area you would have to drive all the way up to Bujumbura, which was about 100 kms and then the 180 kms. It was a 280 kms jaunt to get from one side of the river to the other. The road, itself was so rough that major trucks were not able to come into the area. There was a hospital clinic nearby with an ambulance. They had stopped picking people up in the area because the road was so rough that the patient arrived in worse shape. It was better just to carry them.

One of the things we were very concerned about in the social analysis was the question of whether the government wanted a road there because this was one of the areas where the uprising had begun before. We asked various officials, but it was very difficult trying to determine that. They said when the government had put down the uprising previously, the military had helicopters and were easily able to come into the area and quell the rebellion. In the ensuing period the military had become even better equipped. But, the road was important to the people for the use of health services and to improve their income via the markets in the area. When I went back they were just starting on the bridge, and had done about 20 kms of the road. Coffee plantings had greatly increased. Palm oil planting had increased. The market had quadrupled in size in its area in the middle of the road project.

It seemed to me a very general benefit. This was a very interesting project because it was one where USAID was paying the cash wages of the workers and the Belgian government was providing the technical assistance. The Japanese government was providing heavy equipment for the road. And Catholic Relief Services was topping up the workers' wages with food-for-work. So, there were quite a lot of aspects of this that needed quite a bit of coordination. In addition to setting up the process of trying to find out what kind of traffic there was on the road, the increasing number of vehicles and what had happened to prices in the market, etc., I also interviewed the road workers and went to their houses and interviewed their wives. All of the people who were working on the roads were men and I wanted to find out whether their wives knew how much they were getting, whether the men being away from the fields was effecting agricultural products available to the household, etc. I also asked the husbands and wives about the food component. Most of the men really didn't care about the food at all, favoring total cash wages. The women, however, were extremely appreciative of the food. They said the food came home, and they benefitted from that. It seemed whether or not the wife knew their husband's wage depended on the age of the wife and how long they had been married. Young wives didn't have any idea what their husbands were earning, but if it was an older and more established relationship, the wives seemed to be fairly aware. The men had to take us to the house because most of the houses were a kilometer or more from the road. I told them that I wanted to ask the women about the cooking, how they cooked the food and any problems they might be having with the foreign food. The men always laughed. It was never a problem. I could talk to the wives about those subjects and the men didn't need to listen in.

Q: This was all through an interpreter?

BRYSON: Oh, yes. I had a Tutsi woman from Rwanda who had come to Burundi. She had a university education. I did find, what I thought was very interesting, something on the impact of the food. In one case, the woman said that she and her husband had taken their entire cassava crop and dried it and actually chartered a truck and took it all the way to market in Bujumbura to sell it. I asked her if she wasn't worried about selling her whole crop. She said that they knew they could earn enough by taking it to market in Bujumbura to afford to purchase in the local market any cassava they needed and still have a nice margin of extra income. But, in any case, she said there was the food-for-work. In overcoming the kind of risk aversion that people have in beginning to participate more in the market economy the Food-For-Work (FFW) ration (bulgur wheat) helped them make those kinds of decisions. So, I did feel that there was certainly major benefits in having the food available as part of the wage.

A lot of the problems we have had with food for work have been in situations where the whole wage was food and the people were told that they were not suppose to sell any of it. That, to me, always seemed to be a very bad policy. In most cases I have seen, people have not been doing anything. They are generally out working five to eight hours with pick and shovel in extremely hot temperatures on these construction projects. I really didn't see those people as being beneficiaries or recipients, they were workers. We expect to be able to use our wage in whatever way seems best. In many cases people could sell what they were getting, like oil, and actually get more calories by purchasing sorghum, etc. They also needed to purchase fuel, or get grain ground or buy condiments to go along with the food. What we were providing was something that was really very basic, food. However, we have to understand that there really are a lot of requirements for cash. But, in this case because the wage was primarily cash, they didn't have to sell the food, they could just use it.

Food Program Studies in Lesotho - 1980

There were a couple of years in a row when I was working on Burundi and when it ended up, I was in Nairobi at the time of the scheduling conference when all of the mission directors and people came to Nairobi and met with the REDSO (USAID Regional Economic Development Service Office) staff to determine how various project planning activities would be carried out. I ran into Frank Correl a couple of years in a row. He said to me, "Judy, I know you were a Food for Peace officer and have done quite a bit of stuff with respect to food studies. In Lesotho we have a dilemma. There is a very large Food for Peace program that the Catholic Relief Services is carrying out with U.S. support. We also are providing all kinds of food to the World Food Program that is also doing large road construction, etc. We are really concerned about the amount of food that comes in and whether it creates dependency. But, we know that all of the people who are working for Food-For-Work (FFW) are women so there are a lot questions about the beneficiary profile."

Q: The men were off working in the mines in South Africa?

BRYSON: Yes. Lesotho is a small country with a population at that time of about 1.5 million. But, there was usually about 1.1 million actually in the country. The other 400,000 were out of the country working in the mines in South Africa.

He said, "You know I have really been wanting to have a study done of all of these various questions, but we would need a team of people to do it. However, because of your background, you might be able to look at it from a lot of different angles."

So, I went out to Lesotho and did this analysis of the food program.

Q: How big was the program?

BRYSON: Catholic Relief Services had about 14,000 recipients working on the roads. Then there was another part of the program that was maternal/child health, which was on the model of bringing the children in to be weighed, providing a nutrition lecture and a ration.

I was looking at both of those programs and had about five weeks to do it. The scope of work covered the gamut from analyzing the imports, the question of where food came from, the agricultural system, to the relationship of schedule of work for the women to the agricultural calendar and that kind of stuff. And also the beneficiary's profile where I was trying to find out a whole lot of questions like: If you were not here working on the road what would you be doing? What kind of activities are they taking people away from. Also trying to figure out the sources of income for the women who were working on the road and what was their age, marital status, etc.

Basically what I found was that the women who were on the road were generally quite old, 40 years and up. There was a kind of hierarchy in terms of access to mine income. The immediate wife and children were the ones who got most of the mine income. The mother of the miner would get a certain amount, but it was second generation and was much less. These women were generally widows or wives of incapacitate husbands due to injuries in mines or illness for whom there was no provision made. They were sent home for their families to look after. These women were often the principal source of income in the family.

A tremendous amount of road access in the country was created by these FFW activities and getting into many of the less accessible communities depended upon the FFW road. A lot of the roadwork was maintenance as well as new roads. I found that at that time, 1980, there was not a single engineer involved in doing the profile of laying out the roads, etc. I went over to the Ministry of Rural Development and there was a sociologist who had a file on each project that mainly showed the number of people who were going to be working on each project. There wasn't anything in the files about plans. This really was a problem with food programs because there was very little understanding on the part of the U.S. government, or anybody else, if you were doing FFW and trying to accomplish something, that the food only provided the wage for people. Any road project that you wanted to look at in the United States, or even India where there is a lot of manual labor used, you might have 60 percent of the cost of building the road being the labor. You had 40 percent or more go to the technical people, the designers, etc.

There are certain things that human beings cannot do effectively. They cannot carry rocks more than a kilometer and be effective. It is far more effective if human beings collect rocks into a pile and then bring a truck there, put the rocks into the truck and drive them to the work site. The same is true if you have to haul water or anything else you have to do. One of the things they were asking me to look at was productivity. There is reams of literature on when you have a simple tool, the right tool, how much more productive labor becomes. The same is true in the way in which you organize the work. The British learned when they were building the railroads in England in the 1800s that, if one went from wage labor to task work on construction projects, work productivity greatly increased because you gave the people the possibility of finishing X amount of work and going home, or doing a second contract and getting paid twice as much. But these projects in Lethoso were organized with no supervision, no proper tools, no engineering laying out of designs and no materials, like concrete, to help them. They were just paying people to turn up for 5 days in a row for four weeks. You had to turnover the labor force every month.

I really thought it was a shame though there were certain things that were well organized, but there had not been a recognition of the importance of technical assistance or how much actually could be accomplished with a little bit of additional resources. Over the whole course of the eighties, the World Food Program sent in a number of people from the ILO and other UN agencies. The World Food Program also did a monetization to create cash. USAID had purchased tools, under section 201; I think it was, where they could do an emergency monetization and end up with local currency. They started using some of that money on providing tools, etc. There really was a tremendous improvement in the quality of what was being done.

The FFW program really was important for women in Lesotho, because they were not allowed to go and work in the Republic of South Africa; only the men were able to do that. There were very few jobs available for women in the private sector or in the government service in Lesotho. These activities provided women with opportunities to earn income and also to learn how to do certain tasks and improve their local environment. It really was a very valuable program.

Q: What were your recommendations?

BRYSON: A whole series of things from the management of the program to getting engineers involved, to working out the quantities of work, identifying all the other things that were needed and finding a budget for those. Basically the question of whether or not the food was a disincentive was pretty much a moot one. I could see that almost always when you look at the question of disincentives you find there aren't any or certainly it has been the case of everything I have looked at there may be some exceptions in say Tunisia or Egypt where the U.S. provided huge quantities of wheat and allowed the government to subsidize the price of flour, or whatever. In most cases the size of the food aid program is really a very minor part of total food requirements.

Now, in Lesotho it wasn't all that minor. When I was looking at it in the beginning, about 50 percent of the food in the country was imported and maybe 25 percent of it came from the food aid program. But, you had to realize with respect to Lesotho that it was a country where people had been pushed behind the Caledon River, and there was really only a very narrow strip of land in front of the Maluti Mountains that was what you would call prime agricultural land. Lesotho actually had a larger population per unit of arable land than did India. The population had been able to grow to the size it was not because of their production in Lesotho but because the outlet was given for people to work in the mines of South Africa. A lot of the money that came from the mine labor was used to import food from South Africa. At that time, the food aid was actually politically important because it meant Lesotho was not quite as much at the mercy of South Africa as they would have been otherwise. So, even in that situation where there was a large amount of food coming in, if the food aid had not been coming in, it would have had to be imported and that would just cut down on the availability of money to purchase other things that had to do with development.

Q: Did the mission make major changes in the program after reading your report?

BRYSON: There weren't really all that many recommendations in the original report. They had asked me to analyze what the situation was and I did put a few suggestions in, but after they read it they asked me to come back and really look at the management of the whole program and give some specific management recommendations. That was the start of my involvement with the Lesotho mission and I continued to go back there through three different mission directors and numerous changes of personnel, so after a while I had more institutional memory of the program and the changes in the program than did any of the people who were in the mission.

The mission decided around 1983 that they wanted to have a major program operating in Lesotho. One in education and one in agriculture. The mission asked me to work on the design of both of those programs. I did the social analysis of both of them. They had an ag economist that they brought in to look at the various things in ag economics. There were connections in both to the food program. There was a major school lunch food program in the education sector and the FFW in the agricultural sector. They wanted to make sure of the linkages to that and they felt I could make a good contribution to the social analysis of these two projects but also see to the linkage of the activities to the food activities. I worked on both of those.

I also came back a number of times to work on improvements in the FFW activities. The last time I went to Lesotho I was hired both by the UN and USAID to work on the strategy towards the phase out of the school lunch that the World Food Program was carrying out in the country.

Q: What was the idea behind the phase out?

BRYSON: The World Food Program was providing food to every school child in the country and as new schools were added and the population grew, etc., it was getting bigger and bigger and bigger. Also, Lesotho actually had more than 100 percent of its school age population in school. The reason for that was that people living around Lesotho, often would send their children into Lesotho to go to school, because they felt it was a freer environment for the children. So, Lesotho and the World Food Program were supporting all of this extra feeding. It was a huge and extremely expensive and difficult thing to get food to all of these schools. The World Food Program people had been providing food for 25 years, and it had just gotten larger and larger. They felt they needed to figure out a way in which they could stop the growth in the size of the program and stage a withdrawal. They thought the first year they would stop any food for the lowland schools, the second year they would cut out the food in the foothill schools and in the third year cut out the food in the mountain schools and then just depart. When I started looking at this thing. I felt that the timetable was much too fast. Instead we planned a phased withdrawal over 15 years.

That was another thing I had often written about. These food programs are actually large distribution mechanisms, and there are established structures that can be utilized for other purposes. If you decided to abandon all of this infrastructure that you have put in place and you do it suddenly, you basically wipe out that infrastructure. On the other hand, if you do it in a phased way that allows for other resources to be brought into play, you can preserve the infrastructure.

Q: Such as?

BRYSON: The schools were visited four times a year when the food was delivered and often school inspectors would ride along in the delivery trucks and make school visits. If you suddenly stopped deliveries of food without putting in some other way that those people could reach the schools, it would end the school inspectors' visits. What happened was that the children walked back and forth to many of these schools over very rough terrain and suddenly cutting out their lunch food supply could have a deleterious effect on their health and everything else. What we needed to do was to see if you couldn't work with the local community and begin to identify some other resources that could come from the community to provide something at the school. It might not be that the community could come up with the full school lunch that was being provided by the World Food Program, but they might be able to come up with something.

The other thing was that the major problem was that the whole thing was operating as an external food drop. You had World Food Program providing food. You had Save the Children in the UK doing all of the logistics to get the food to the schools. UNICEF was providing the bowls and utensils. The communities really weren't heavily involved and no effort had been made to bring them in.

What we suggested instead that they look at a fifteen-year phase out but stop immediately adding any new schools. If new schools came along, they didn't get food. They should start in the northern lowlands and gradually phase out through the lowlands. They would do the phase out in each place over a three-year period. The first year when the school was still getting its full allotment, they would start organizing the PTAs and start working on plans for improvements and try to strengthen the schools in general. Again we were able to go around towns and sort of shop this idea around and found that the Canadians had a small project fund that was around \$400,000 a year. It was a very big headache for them because they were supposed to dole it out in \$5,000 or \$10,000 increments. But we could offer them with this program that x number of schools that were going to be phased out of the food program would need an access road, x number of schools needed a water supply, etc. so that they could program their whole project fund into supporting schools but also gain activities that communities could coalesce around as well as thinking how do we come up with a way of dealing with the fact of the food being withdrawn.

In the second year, you would continue with all of these activities and the schools would get half as much food as they had normally received. The third year you could still continue to work with the communities after the phase out of the food was complete. What we showed was that, if you did that at the end of five years, you would have half as big a program as you would have had if you continued your old strategy. You also would be able to leave behind as you withdraw something that is stronger and perhaps capable of carrying on without outside support..

Q: Did that happen?

BRYSON: Yes. Cheryl Cowan who now works with me here at AFRICARE was one of the Peace Corps volunteers who worked in Lesotho in the nineties and she was part of the school self-reliance program. During the food emergency they had in the early nineties, they did use the school food distribution system for the emergency response.

Q: Who managed this phase out?

BRYSON: Basically, the World Food Program and Save the Children, etc. had people there who were working on it. Now, the results of this program are one of the things that I am really quite pleased about.

Q: It is phased out, I guess?

BRYSON: I don't think it is completely phased out yet. The CRS had totally phased out their activities in the country.

During the period from 1981 to 1992 when I joined AFRICARE I had two important assignments. The first was a job with the World Bank working on what was called the Women in Development (WID) package. This was an activity of a number of UN agencies and was one of the few times that the United Nations Development Program gave funds so the World Bank could participate. I worked for Katrine Saito in the WID section of the Program and Policy Analysis section. We did a study of four countries, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Nigeria and Zambia. I worked on the Burkina Faso study. The work in Burkina and Zambia was desk studies, while those in Nigeria and Kenya were carried out through questionnaire surveys. The activity resulted in a number of important reports, and it also resulted in a number of changes in the way the Ministries of Agriculture operated in the field.

The second activity I was involved in was a Famine Mitigation Activity that USAID funded and the Ministry of Agriculture managed. I worked with Steven Hansch in writing a report on Food and Cash for Work interventions in famine mitigation.

Joined Africare as the Director for Food Development Programs - 1991/92

I began doing work for AFRICARE in 1991; it was really the beginning of 1992. They asked me to work on doing the economic analysis and contribution to the overall design of a program in Kaolack region of Senegal, and I went there and did that activity. During the time that I was doing it the woman who was my predecessor at AFRICARE, Katherine Puffenburger, had realized that she was going to have to leave this position because her husband was moving to Niger, and she had made the decision that she would go with him. I had been contacted originally to do the work in Senegal because they expected that it was going to be a monetization program. But it eventually became so changed in the course of our design work to a P.L. 480 Title III program not a Title II program that the USAID Mission decided that they would actually fund it with dollars. AFRICARE had been interested in me because of my background with food and when Katherine told them that she was going to be leaving she suggested that they interview me for the job. They had had the opportunity to get to know something about my work in the course of doing the Kaolack design so I did an interview with them and they decided to hire me. I was very lucky in that I had quite a substantial overlap with her because there was a vacant position as her Assistant and I was able to start in April and she didn't leave until June.

In the beginning I was the Food Resources Program Manager and I had an assistant whom I set out to hire right away. Also, we had a secretarial position in the department and the Food for Development fellow's position was approved to start pretty shortly after I started work. At that time AFRICARE had just one Title II program in Guinea Bissau. AFRICARE is a PVO that came to food aid quite late as far as being a cooperating sponsor. They had always been prepared to distribute food in emergencies but they would get the food in country from either an organization like Catholic Relief Services who received emergency allocations or from the World Food Program. They had really started to build up their program or even to consider it only after a great deal of soul searching. There was a very strong feeling on the part of the staff and the Board of Directors that food aid was dependency creating, and they were concerned about trying to use it as a development resource. They could see the possibility of having monetization of food commodities which, in that context, it could be a development resource and also in the context of FFW. So they had started working on establishing programs that would include those two activities.

The program in Guinea Bissau was a 100% monetization program. The Government was concerned about having food distribution in the type of program that AFRICARE was proposing to do, which was working with rural enterprise people who were mainly processing food products. They didn't see how food distribution would be appropriate within such a program. The Food for Development program had started off as 100% monetization program and, as the program developed in the years after I joined AFRICARE, the second program that we designed was in Sierra Leone. That program ended up being a program in which AFRICARE received support from World Food Program and from the European community rather than from USAID. We also worked on a design for a program for Burkina Faso that originally wasn't accepted.

In 1992 we ran into difficulties because of the major drought in Southern Africa. USAID felt that it had to divert a lot of what would ordinarily have gone as developmental food aid to support pretty much Government programs in that area as well as large distribution programs. They had a hierarchy of programs that they would support with 100% monetization having the lowest priority, so the Burkina Faso program that AFRICARE had been writing, just at the time that I joined them, was not accepted.

Q: There wasn't a problem with the program.

BRYSON: Well, it really wasn't reviewed, and, then, when we turned it in the next time, there were some queries about the design of the dams. Also, by that time Burkina Faso was becoming a non-USAID presence country, and they didn't want to start anything new in that context. USAID was in the process of phasing out of the country. The non-presence country issue has been a major issue over all the period that I have been working at AFRICARE because Africa is so heavily affected by it. The number of missions is being reduced sharply and initially there was a very strong attitude of "out is out." That is when USAID closed its mission, all forms of U.S. assistance to the country would end. The PVO community was very concerned by this attitude because the choice of the countries where USAID would remain was often made on the basis of their development prospects, and they were in many cases the countries that had less food problems than countries that were becoming non-presence countries.

Q: The poor were getting cut out?

BRYSON: Yes, the other thing that the PVOs felt was that the Title II Food Aid, which comes under the Farm Bill, had a different purpose than much of USAID's activities; food security rather than development. Well, you know, it is very clear that the intention is to help provide food for the poorest countries and the countries most in need. When you looked at countries most in need, countries like Chad and Burkina Faso where there is now no longer a USAID mission, they were obviously way down on the food security index. There was, at that time, a very major effort that went on to change this approach that required a USAID presence in order to have a Title II program. This effort eventually culminated in the Congress making changes to the 1995 Farm Bill (which was signed in April of 1996) to actually say that a PVO program in a country could not be denied on the basis that USAID did not have a mission in the country.

Q: Was Africare particularly dependent on having a mission in the country?

BRYSON: Well, this was the other thing that the PVOs felt was that all organizations do become responsible for the food commodities as soon as they are put aboard ship and undeniably having the presence of an Ambassador or someone in the country who can express an interest in the food, was very helpful. Often like in Guinea Bissau, AFRICARE would set it up so the Ambassador would go down to the port and would have dinner with the captain and there would be a photo op about the American food and this kind of thing. That certainly made it easier for us to get the food through the ports and minimize losses and so forth. We actually did not have very much oversight by USAID at any of our projects. There is a whole set of management procedures in place and C-133 audits and all of this sort of thing. So the PVOs kept saying to USAID you know we feel that we do manage these programs pretty much independently and that you ought to be able to come and visit our projects periodically and see what is there. There should be some way of arranging that and that the accountability questions can be handled within the ordinary audit procedures. So there should be a way of making provision for us to continue doing these programs in these very, very poor countries even though there is no USAID mission there. USAID was not really prepared to do that until the law required it. It is partially with respect to this that I shouldn't say that USAID is a monolith; the Food for Peace Office, I think, and the Bureau of Humanitarian Response tended to be somewhat in agreement with the PVOs.

The African Bureau, in some cases, might have been supportive. But there was a very strong attitude from the Management Bureau of USAID that USAID had been criticized by Congress for not focusing its resources. If they were to do any of these other kinds of activities, it would be a diversion that would take away from the resources that USAID had. It's fair; it should also be noted that USAID was, I think, second only to the Department of Defense or maybe was even as much as the Department of Defense in the percentage of employee cut back that they have had to endure during their re-engineering period. With the very, very limited operational budgets, it was a concern, because, as long as USAID remained responsible for oversight, it felt that it had to put at least minimal employee resources for food aid oversight.

So, there has been a real tug-of-war back and forth between USAID and the PVO community on this particular subject. But, they now appear to be developing different kinds of procedures that make it possible to carry on these programs. For example, in West Africa, even though the decision has been taken to close the REDSO in West Africa. They have set up twining arrangements with missions that are remaining, like the Senegal Mission has now been twined with Cape Verde and with Guinea Bissau and Mauritania. The Senegal USAID mission takes responsibility, and they have one person on the staff who travels around to visit the other countries. They also have assigned two Food for Peace officers to the Mali USAID Mission, who will have regional responsibilities and will be able to travel around and visit different countries and activities.

I think as time passed it really did become clearer that the U.S. Government did not wish to abandon countries, especially the countries of the Sahel which had experienced numerous critical food shortage situations and also remain very vulnerable to refugee movements and so forth. I mean countries like the Central African Republic and Chad; both have large refugee populations from Sudan. They have very difficult weather conditions that they are facing so that the PVOs had pointed out that as long as we maintained some sort of a presence in those countries with our developmental food aid activities, it did provide a framework for building up and responding if there was a requirement. At the same time, there was a real need to improve the situation in areas of the country that were always chronically food short, but that those areas became a real problem for governments; trying to care for them was a drag on development of the whole country.

Also, it was a real civil society problem in that these remote rural areas, often with fairly large populations, would be in crisis. So, AFRICARE actually has a program in Chad, which is a non-presence country that has been approved. We also are in the final stages now after all these years of getting a program approved for Burkina Faso. It is a completely different kind of project than the one that we had proposed in 1992. In fact, it is sort of interesting because of what I had worked on in the Kaolack region early in 1992. USAID did fund that and it has operated; in fact, it ended up being a six year program phasing out in September of 1998. It started in September of 1992. Our Burkina Faso program is actually been designed somewhat along the lines of the Kaolack program, but it is taking into account all of the lessons learned from Kaolack.

Q: Let's go back to that, that's one you recently designed, what were the principal characteristics of that project; you had a lot of time now to see what worked and what didn't work?

Kaolack Agricultural Enterprise Development (KAED) Program - Senegal

BRYSON: The project was called the Kaolack Agricultural Development(KAED) Program and it consisted of identifying villages and doing a set of activities with them. We originally had planned on 72 villages; in the end we worked in just 56. KAED was a program where we would work with groups within the community. Groups that had been registered as Groupement d'Interet Economique (GIEs), which is a kind of an incorporation that is practiced in Senegal, The GIEs have a legal personality. They can be sued and so you can work with such groups and provide them with loans and so forth.

Q: Where do they come from?

BRYSON: In many cases they had sort of started as community solidarity groups. AFRICARE wanted though to have a very strong component of women's groups involved in this. Many of those had been organized by the Women's Bureau of the government. They were registered with the women's group but they weren't necessarily GIE so we helped them go through the registration process for their business plan. We were fairly rigid in that program in the types of activities that these groups would undertake. It was an agriculturally based enterprise promotion program, so AFRICARE wasn't going to be doing just any type of micro enterprise development. It was specifically for enterprises that were either involved in producing, processing or marketing food. The three types of activities supported were animal fattening, vegetable gardening and cereal milling in addition to a field that was farmed in common by the group.

As we went through the process of preparing the project design, it became apparent it was going to be very costly per beneficiary for just focusing on this kind of micro enterprise development. The government, as well as USAID, were very concerned about the environment in the Kaolack region. So, we decided that what we would do was to have a major component of the activity be demonstration fields and these demonstration fields were the first activity that the group would undertake. This was all a part of helping the group to become more solid, but while they were preparing the business plan for their enterprise they would establish this field. There is a possibility in Senegal to go to the Canton Administration if you can show that you have the capacity to improve an area of land and ask for land to be allocated to you to in secure tenure. These groups were able to go to the Canton Administration and, in each case, the demonstration fields are four hectares in size. AFRICARE and the Senegalese Agricultural Research Institute, the Ministry of Agriculture Extension Service and so forth all worked with these community groups to set up the fields; they put living fences around the fields. They put all of the kinds of improved environmental techniques and practices that the research people had identified as helping to both increase yields and to reduce soil loss. So they've got things like infield trees and rock lines and all of those sorts of things. The demonstration fields actually have proven to be a very, very important part of these programs.

Q: What are they demonstrating?

BRYSON: Actually, these fields are farmed just like a typical farm and the four hectare size was because in this area that's the typical size of a family land holding. They planted in rotation peanuts, sorghum, millet and the typical crops that are grown. But they had to be able to show over the period of the project that the people from the village could make a profit farming in this way. It's land that was fairly new but usually land that nobody wanted to farm because it wasn't any good, that was why it was vacant. They have been able to produce better crops off of these fields than the neighbors' fields around them. The evaluation of the project showed that there was substantial uptake of these types of environmental practices.

Specifically, there were things like wind breaks and living fences, infield trees, rock lines. They were all practices that improved the soil quality of the fields, and its fertility, and water availability. They also did introduce improved seeds and that sort of thing. But, because they were a substantial size (AFRICARE has 56 of these farms that we were working with so we have like 228 hectares of land dispersed around the Kaolack region) demonstrating that improvements in yields are possible using environmentally sustainable methods.

Q: How many people in these villages?

BRYSON: I think that altogether there are more than 50,000 people in the villages. The other thing that was very useful is that these demonstration fields have resulted in quite a lot of people coming from other villages to visit them. The produce from the fields is sold. The people have used our idea - one of the things that was a little bit different - that the demonstration fields would provide a means to have a spread effect because both the people who were members of the group would be learning how to use these techniques on their own family fields, but also the people who are not members of the group would see the results of it. The agriculture extension staff could bring groups to the fields and show them what the techniques were and how they could improve it. We thought also that the money from the fields would go into the business enterprises and actually that hasn't happened. The people have tended instead to create revolving credit funds with the revenues from the field. That has meant that the people associated with the fields over the years have been able to get larger and larger loans because there has been this combination of them getting loans, paying them back, and increasing the pool with revenues from each cycle of the agricultural season.

Q: As part of the group?

BRYSON: As being members of the group you are able personally to get larger loans.

Q: How many people in a group?

BRYSON: In some of them there are as much as 150. They are women's groups.

Q: They are all women's groups?

BRYSON: No, I think probably between 70 and 80 percent of people in the groups are women. That is partially because the women's groups are very large in most cases. We had thought originally that the women's groups would be involved mostly in cereal milling and in vegetable gardening, but they have also been involved in the animal fattening activities. I think that we did find that it was particularly helpful to women even as a member of a group of 150 women to have secure tenure of four hectares of land because, in many cases, women, if they receive land that they may be allocated for one season or whatever, it may not be a very large plot. It's very hard for them to make improvements to the field or get good returns off of it because they don't really want to put that much into it given that condition. So, that has been a real benefit, that they have been able to have access to land to farm which they were able to make all of these improvements to. Even though there are a lot of women, four hectares of land is a lot of good land for even that group of women to be able to farm.

Q: Who was the person who taught these people how to farm four hectares and introduce the new technology?

BRYSON: AFRICARE actually had only two expatriates involved in the project team. One of them was the Project Coordinator and the other was the Logistician for the project. The Deputy Project Coordinator and all of the technical people involved with the project were all Senegalese; I think there was upwards to 26 Senegalese who were involved.

Q: Did they get special training on the whole concept?

BRYSON: Oh yes, and they really were a very, very expert team of people. There were motivators or extension agents, each covered a technical team that included a development expert and a conservation expert and an economist to support five villages. The project had a really intensive base line analysis and surveys throughout; it had a final evaluation that showed the results. One of the things I was really personally very pleased about was the cereal milling part of the activity; it was something that the Agricultural Economist of the U.S. Mission had been very opposed to because the analysis that they had done showed that cereal milling was not financially viable given the low incomes of women. It's really very distressing that when cereal milling was something that was introduced in Europe before the time of Christ along the rivers that now in West Africa women's labor is still considered of such limited value that women are spending two to three hours a day grinding grain by hand. I have always felt there had to be a better way, that what women are doing is actually much more socially valuable than having them expend that much time and energy on cereals. With the way in which these cereal mills were organized they were able to be quite viable enterprises. What the economic analysis showed was that, if AFRICARE had given them a loan for the mill, and they had had to pay back the loan as well as amortise the mill as well as run the mill, it was true they would not have been able to make it viable. But, that's in a straight out financial perspective; if you looked at it from an economic cost-benefit analysis, there was always a very good rate of return from that perspective.

Q: Why?

BRYSON: Even taking the value of women's labor working on unskilled work in the area, it had a good economic rate of return, but you had to figure out a way of financially setting up the operation so that it could become a solid operation. What we did was that the women's group had to come up with millers to be trained. It had to come up with a President, Secretary and Treasurer to be trained and have an area of land allocated for the mill to be placed on and build a building to house the mill. That was their contribution. The mill was given to the community when they had gone through all the training and so forth, but the millers who were invariably men never were involved with the money for the milling operation. The women's group sold tokens to women who wanted to have grain ground and they would take the tokens to the mill and turn them over to the millers. One token for each kilo of grain to be ground and the millers would turn the tokens in. The millers were paid a percentage of the revenues of each month. If there isn't a lot of grain to be ground they don't get a salary for each day. Also they are required to put away 50% of the money in the bank until they have enough money to purchase a new mill. After that they can begin to do other things with that 50% of the money. They use 25% of the money to pay the millers, 25% of the money they retain for gasoline and spare parts and so forth to run the mill and the other 50% for other things. The women's groups have been able to keep operating these mills and to save enough money to replace them.

They are now generating additional money. One of the women's groups that I went to talk to was considering opening a small shop in the town as the next step for their investments. Everything that AFRICARE found was that, as we went through the course of this project, there began to be a real demand in these villages from the women for services. They came to AFRICARE and said, "You know we have the resources, we can build a health facility, a small public health post for someone to come and what we would like is for you to help us get connected with the Health Services so that someone comes here occasionally, and also set up an essential drug program; we can afford to pay for it. We have income from our activities. We are finding that our ill health and our children's ill health is actually becoming a liability, because we now have something else we can do with our time that is productive and are losing a lot of time from our work because of these problems." It was a really nice way around to introduce Health Services to communities that needed them was, at first, to help the women become economically more self-reliant they could then begin to take on some of these other activities.

Q: Did all the women in the villages belong to these groups?

BRYSON: Quite often they do; if they don't, they do benefit from being able when they have the money to get their cereal ground and these other services that begin to be provided. We had decided to do these demonstration fields partially because we wanted to have something within the project that would create a much greater spread effect and a much greater impact on the incomes of the communities at large. We decided to use farming a common field because that is something that is done typically by groups all across West Africa. Community groups will farm a field together, and they will sell the produce from the field. They will put it in the common little bank that they keep and use it as kind of a solidarity fund. If someone in the group has a death in the family and they need money for the funeral and stuff like that, they will parcel the money out. This has allowed them to really have a very substantial amount of money coming off of the field and it has been used for a lot of other kinds of loans for productive activities.

Q: How does food get in to this picture? You need that?

BRYSON: In Kaolack, we didn't have it. You see originally we had expected that we were going to monetize wheat to come up with the funds for the project, but USAID had money left in their budget so they decided just to fund it with dollars after the project was designed. This happened to AFRICARE several times in the early years of our food program. AFRICARE also designed a large program in Guinea called the Forcariah Roads Program, which USAID funded with dollars. It wasn't until 1995 that we designed the Dinguiraye Food Security Initiative in Guinea that is actually being supported with Title II Food Monetization.

Q: What did you learn from the Kaolack that you are now applying to Burkina Faso?

BRYSON: We found that the demonstration fields are really very useful. The villages that are participating in the program in Burkina Faso will also have the demonstration field aspect of the project. The cereal milling will probably also be handled by groups, but what we did find was that the other activities like vegetable gardening, animal fattening and so forth. There really needed to be as broad a range of activities as possible within the project, like bee keeping and some other activities.

We also found that particularly with the animal fattening, it very expensive to purchase animals and to feed them, but you can get quite a lot of revenue from the sale of animals. It can be quite big business. It has many more problems when you have 40 or 50 animals that a group is looking after. There are conflicts on who is coming to water the animals, who has done this work and that work and so forth. It gets to be a real problem. So what we decided to do in the new project is rather to identify individuals within the community who are particularly good at handling animals and provide them with assistance so they can demonstrate to their neighbors how to care for animals. The business enterprises that would be promoted would be more in individual family compounds rather than having one large corral, which is pretty expensive infrastructure. The project clearly showed the benefit of having these substantial sized fields and involving women.

Q: Are you using this technique generally? Demonstration fields are not unusual.

BRYSON: No AFRICARE does that quite a bit but it is the combination, I think, of the common field which helps to create more cash resources within the community that can be reinvested with others and then providing access to credit and other services so that people can undertake an enterprise. It is the combination that made it different and useful.

I should say that I think it would be useful to go back and go through a chronology of the programs. The Guinea Bissau program had started in 1990 and the first phase of it concluded in 1994. AFRICARE had also, starting in 1993, designed a program for Eritrea and the two programs were revised, the Guinea Bissau program and the new Eritrea program both began in the fall of 1994.

Q: They were all built on the concept of monetization that was an innovation at that time? What brought about the change and what is it?

Concept of monetization

BRYSON: Monetization is just the sale of food commodities in the commercial sector. There had been from the early '80s a general and growing awareness that there was a requirement to have access more cash resources in order to carry out food programs. This became particularly acute when USAID wanted to build up its programs in Africa because the African Governments had the least resources to be able to pay for the inland movement of food and they also had the greatest distances and the most difficult transport situations. Much more difficult than Latin America even or the sub-continent of Asia and the governments of India and Bangladesh had a lot more resources to deal with these issues. There had been a growing request to find sources of cash other than the governments. The governments pointed out in the case of emergencies USAID would pay for the transportation and the storage and handling of commodities. In developmental food aid, which was the type of food that could actually get to the roots of the problems and do things like building farm to market roads, constructing schools and health posts. These could help them with more sustainable long term improvements in their economy. When the programs changed from emergency assistance to these more sustainable activities, USAID said to the governments: "You have to pay for the inland transportation." Or they said to the PVOs: "You have to come up with the money to pay for the transportation." Neither the governments nor PVOs really had sufficient money to be able to do that on any real large scale in Africa. The governments in Asia had been able to come up with that money.

There was a whole movement over the course of the 1980s of awareness that the people who were working on things like Food for Work were taking time away from other activities that was important to their incomes. People were concerned that they not be wasting their time. They were prepared to come and work because they did not have enough food, but it was really important that the structures that they were working on really generate improvements to the economy. Without tools, without technical supervision, without architects and others to survey the roads and design the buildings and so forth that wasn't happening so there needed to be cash resources for that purpose.

There has always been a reluctance to provide any substantial amount or to take a substantial portion of the budget for the food and ocean transportation and convert it into money to pay for these costs. That then reduces the amount of food you can get for people overseas. So eventually it was decided that monetization would be the way that these problems could be dealt with. There was often excess demand within commercial markets in countries for sale of food commodities, but governments could not allocate foreign exchange for those commodities to be imported. As a result there was space in the markets without really causing any disincentive in local production, without causing any real problems with respect to the normal commercial sales in markets for the sale of food commodities to take place. Originally, it was only allowed to pay for the transportation of food, but that was changed very quickly to allow monetization also for paying for technical assistance, project supplies and other things that were needed in programs. The way the law was written it also said that the PVOs were required to monetize 15% of their programs on a worldwide basis. That was a floor not a ceiling so you could have 100% monetization programs in particular places.

The second program that AFRICARE designed in Eritrea had the intention to combine monetization and food for work activity. However, the Eritrean Government changed its regulations after the project was approved and said that on the type of activity AFRICARE was doing, they were stopping all food for work and it could only be cash for work for constructing the irrigation structure. So that project, which we had expected would be a combination project, became a 100% monetization project.

The Guinea program where AFRICARE was working is on the border of the country and the intention was always 100% monetization; we are purchasing some local food commodities to use to demonstrate weaning foods in the health program. We are not trying to distribute American commodities within that program. There was the Guinea Bissau program that remained 100% monetization. The Eritrean program became 100% monetization and Guinea is 100% monetization program.

After Guinea we designed the regional program which included originally five countries, Chad, Niger, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali and Burkina Faso. USAID actually only approved the Chad and Mali components of the program and AFRICARE asked us to redesign the Burkina Faso component which we have done. We hope now that it will also be able to start. Those are all 100% monetization. The Ethiopia program, which has just been approved, actually will include food for work, but again as far as the American food commodities are concerned it is 100% monetization. We are going to purchase local food commodities close to the project site for the food for work because of the remoteness of where AFRICARE is working which is on the Sudanese border. It's just not cost-effective to transport the American commodities all the way there.

Q: Why don't you say something about why monetization is so important and how it works and what is Africare's approach to it. Is it like everybody else's or is there some characteristic of how they handle it?

BRYSON: AFRICARE is different because most of the other organizations who originally were monetizing had a long history of food distribution. They really were interested primarily in getting the money so they could transport food and also provide for these other resources. So their staff and the people they had working on the programs were really more interested in getting the food sold with the minimum amount of difficulty and then getting on with what they saw as being the real purpose of their programs. AFRICARE has taken the approach that we would only use a food resource in countries where we had confirmed that there was a requirement for food. The other aspect of it was that we are really very well aware that a lot of the problem that Africa has with famines is the fact that markets are not well developed and the African countries are not well connected to international trade. There are lots of problems with the movement of commodities through ports, with clearance of documents, with transportation, with the sophistication of traders. The traders are often just happy to remain in the capital cities. Even though there is a market, there is demand, there is money in some of the more remote areas, they don't bother to go there because they are content with what they get from their urban sales.

What AFRICARE has been doing has in a small way helped develop these traders and markets. There has been throughout this decade of the nineties a great opening up of markets in Africa and there have been a lot of organizations that have been working to try and improve internal flows of food. In the 1980s there have been a number of African governments, like Tanzania and Ethiopia that actually had restrictions against food movements within the country. People were not able to move food from surplus areas to areas that were in deficit and sell it. You had to instead sell any food you had to the government and then the government supposedly through its agencies was going to take the food to the other areas but it didn't really work very well. With the changing of this environment, there is much more potential to do this kind of thing.

Guinea Bissau was our initial country. Guinea Bissau had gone through a long period of a socialist government where people had been banned from selling even matches on the street corners. Everything had to be purchased from the State Trading Companies and about two or three years before we started our work there the government had changed. They had started opening up and markets had begun to be developed, but there were very, very few traders. Initially, we found that when we tried to do a sale of an entire shipload of rice or a single sale of all of the rice included in our program for the year that nobody bid and the three or four big traders in the town eventually came around and told us that they had decided that this particular one, one particular trader would have the right to purchase this and none of the rest of them were going to get involved with it. So we were essentially forced to negotiate with him and to sell the commodities to him. We decided after the initial two efforts in that regard that rice was not a good commodity because of its political ramifications. We changed to oil and wheat flour that we could sell to a number of people. We gradually expanded the numbers that we sold it to. We reduced the lot size that people had to purchase at one time, and we developed a system of negotiated sales with a lottery. We've never been able to convince the Chamber of Commerce in Guinea Bissau that bidding is something that will increase the overall price of commodities. What we do is we use a lottery system; we fix a price and then people come in giving us an intent to purchase and we open up all of the intents to purchase. What we have found is that except for one or two times, the amounts that people want to purchase is not greater than the total amount available.

AFRICARE sets the price at a level that covers all costs and that has been acceptable in the market. In other places like in Guinea we actually do have bids. Initially in Eritrea we had people bidding. What we try to do is we spend a lot of time speaking with the people in the business community finding out what they are doing, what their problems are. AFRICARE has gone around the country to the regional capitols and sought out traders and informed them of the possibility of purchasing the commodities and when the bids were going to be opened and so forth. In Guinea Bissau we went from what we were selling to one guy to where more than 90 traders over time have participated in these sales.

We've also been very interested in seeing what happens to the food commodities after they arrive. So AFRICARE carries out post sales surveys and sees how long it takes the commodities to clear the market. The way in which they are sold. We found that in Guinea Bissau, for instance, we sell them in 250 liter barrels. The way in which they are sold in the markets is either people come with their own containers. Also they will take them and actually get like a test tube, like a long plastic test tube it looks like, and put oil in it; they will tie them off with like two tablespoons at a time and the people will come and purchase just the amount that they can afford. This actually has been very helpful to the poor because most of the other oil that is imported is imported in one-liter plastic containers and it is sold that way. So it is more difficult for people to purchase it. Over time others have seen that this; you know, AFRICARE has been able to sell these commodities and recover all costs. So other traders have begun to participate in the market bringing in barrels of oil from Ghana. We could see that this was helping stimulate the markets. Also the kinds of systems we have set up to move the commodities through the ports has been a demonstration of a way of doing that efficiently. In Guinea Bissau the WFP program was losing about 19% of its commodities between the unloading process and moving it to the warehouses. AFRICARE loses less than 1%.

Q: That's a very staff intensive process, right?

BRYSON: It does require quite a bit of staff. What we have done in the beginning, AFRICARE used its own staff to do all of the checking, but more recently our monetization coordinators have been interviewing school leavers in the town and training them and using them for the period of the unloading and having a much smaller number of our staff supervise them. In Guinea, we have pretty much done the same sort of thing with less numbers of people. It's this interest in the sale itself that has been somewhat different with respect to AFRICARE. I suspect there are other organizations that have come in and who are doing 100% monetization like TechnoServe that have followed along and are probably pursuing a somewhat similar approach.

Q: Then the proceeds are just used to finance the project?

BRYSON: That's right.

Q: Are you able to raise adequate funding this way?

BRYSON: What we have found is that USAID has continuously tightened regulations on these sales, partially because they had quite a number of cases where the PVOs were selling the commodities for less than the Free On Board Ship (FOB) price in the United States. Now you are required to get 80% of the C and F charge (cost and freight charge) to get the commodities to the country. In most cases we have gotten well up in the 90%. We have been able to quite easily make the requirement.

Q: But you don't make a profit on that?

BRYSON: No, we are not making more than the cost and freight. The problem is that the U.S. Government may not be the most efficient purchaser and there are quite a number of issues that we continuously work on. There is often a demand for commodities in the markets all over the world. The same type of commodities, the same time of the year and so in the U.S. the demand for wheat flour goes up in November, December because of Christmas and all the extra baking that is done at Christmas time and the same is true everywhere else. So you have this issue of the processors of commodities having to work triple shifts. As a result, the commodities cost more at that time of the year. If a commercial company was purchasing the commodities, they would probably utilize different strategies; their cost positions would be different in doing these kinds of exports. But, I think that we have found, for instance, in a place like Uganda, AFRICARE decided to propose to monetize wheat and it became apparent that we were able to sell U.S. winter wheat at more than 100% cost recovery and following that Seaboard and some other commercial interests got involved in doing some commercial sales. Our cost positions in going into these countries and spending a lot of time talking with the people and finding out how the markets operate and how the markets work, that is something that a U.S. commercial company with the salaries that they have and the benefits they provide their staff would not be able to afford to do. It is also kind of a long-term process. Following some of these initial efforts and as the markets get more developed they become much more interesting for regular commercial interests.

The philosophy underlying Food for Development programs

Q: Okay, that is excellent. Let's turn to the philosophy of food for development. What are the concepts you yourself have been trying to bring to the AFRICARE program? Then we can talk about individual programs or examples, but what are the characteristics that you understand should be in a program in Africa.

BRYSON: I should say that one of the reasons why I joined AFRICARE was that the philosophy of working with the communities and enabling communities to become able to have the capacity to improve their standard of living has always been Africare's philosophy. They don't have any of the sorts of baggage that comes along with organizations that have had a perspective that the poor must be taken care of because of religious works or whatever. AFRICARE has always worked, seeing the Africans as partners in the development process that you work together with the Africans and you recognize that the people on the African continent have very good reasons for why they do various things. The attitude that African farming is primitive and backward does not really take into account, the reasons why farmers do things. African soils are very, very difficult soils and, if you remove all the tree trunks and all the trees and everything from the fields in order to plow them, you end up with rock hard soil that doesn't do anything. The whole agriculture is actually what is really adapted to most of the African soils. I've been very interested recently to see the advertisements that Archer Daniels Midland has on television about minimum tillage agriculture here in the United States and the recognition that that also is important here. We need to move back from some of the really deep plowing approaches that we have been doing in the United States. I'm hopeful that maybe some of these technologies may help the Africans.

If you are going to introduce changes into the communities you have to be very certain that those changes are really going to make a difference. You also have to be sure that the people in the communities understand how to use the technologies. We have, in our food security programs, built the programs around a village action planning process. Groups within the communities develop information about the food security situation in the area and the various factors which impact upon that food security situation. They then take the information to the community as a whole and discuss it with them. The next step is to come up with plans for the communities; they participate in the preparation of those plans. Establish what can best be done to improve the food security situation, what are the priority constraints, and then carry out the plan together with the communities continuing in the process collecting information and feeding it back into the communities.

Q: What is food security; what do you mean by that?

Food security defined

BRYSON: Food security has been defined in a USAID Policy Determination as when all people at all times have sufficient food to lead a healthy and productive life. There are three aspects to food security: availability of food, access to food, and utilization of food. Each one of those is a necessary condition. Availability and access are both necessary but not sufficient conditions. You really have to get to the utilization of food and the proper utilization of food before you achieve food security. There's been a lot of discussion back and forth about this utilization part because it gets you into a lot of aspects of nutrition, health and sanitation, which some people consider as far afield from food. But what we have found is that if you just focus on food utilization, on teaching mothers how to feed children better and weighing children and so forth, it does not work. You continuously have the mothers telling you that they know what we have been saying is true but they don't have the resources at home to execute what we're suggesting - not we but I mean the health workers - that they do. It actually often just makes women feel guiltier about their inability to provide the kinds of things they would like to provide for their children. There has to be something included in each activity that really works on increasing availability and access to food so Africare's programs have been generally quite comprehensive in that they have an aspect of increasing availability.

For instance, in Mozambique what we are doing there, is introducing an improved sunflower seed along with a hand press for oil that is very lucrative for the people who purchase the mills. We are planning on establishing - I think the project proposal is for 300 of these mills around in a 60 or 70 village area. We are not focusing on helping poor people become mill owners but rather encouraging entrepreneurs in the communities to buy these oil presses and then encouraging other people to grow much more sunflower seed because they know that they will have a ready market for it. They can also take the seed to the presses and get it pressed and have oil available to consume in their household. There's a whole aspect of increasing incomes and increasing food availability through the oil pressing activity, but it goes along with this village action planning process that is focused around child nutrition and also promoting the consumption of oil. In Mozambique, people do not eat enough oil for minimum good health. It sounds strange to Americans who spend most of their time trying to reduce their fat, but you do need to have fiber and six kilos of oil per year in your diet in order to be able to metabolize vitamins A and D, which are extremely important for good nutrition and good health. They are not water soluble, only soluble in oil so there is a certain level of oil that needs to be consumed. The program promotes oil consumption as well as increasing the quantity of oil.

In Douala, the program is very focused on child survival and child health improvement, but we found in Douala that one of the major problems was food storage. People sold a lot of what they produced because they had such severe problems with mold and with pests. The mold problem actually causes aflatoxin issues which are a very serious problem with food; you have it with both corn and peanuts which are the main components in the diet there. It attacks your liver and immune system and makes it much more difficult for people to metabolize and use the food.

Q: Where does the aflatoxin come from?

BRYSON: If you get these molds and various other problems in stored crops. It's in crops that have oil in them like corn, i.e. the oil component that gets the aflatoxin in it.

Q: Do they grow that way?

BRYSON: No, it is in the storage process. The storage has to be done in certain ways in order to avoid aflatoxin problems. So there is a whole element of that program which is working on improved storage in the communities to increase both the quantity and quality of food that is available to feed the children. In Eritrea, AFRICARE has only focused on constructing an irrigation structure and improving the agricultural production around the irrigation structure. But, we have a child survival activity in the same area that is dealing with the nutritional and utilization aspects of food.

In Ethiopia, we are just going to focus on increasing sorghum production even though we know, in the area where we are working, there are really severe health problems. We have thought of following along with the lessons learned in Senegal. It is going to be hugely challenging to do the agricultural side of this particular activity. We look to perhaps developing a child survival activity in the same area, a couple of two to three years after we start with the food security activity. But we still, even in those places, intend to work with the communities on education awareness of the broad range of what is affecting their food security and their nutritional situation. That should help in introducing some of the other activities at a later point.

Q: What do you build into these projects to give some assurance that after you withdraw that they will keep going?

BRYSON: I think a lot of it comes from the community capacity building component of the projects. At the present time that really isn't part of the results framework of the indicators that we are supposed to be measuring in these projects.

Q: Why not?

BRYSON: Partially, I think it is because they are very hard to measure and the results framework tends to focus on things like increased yields and the things that you can measure such as anthropometrics in improvements in weight, improvements in height, reduction of stunting and so forth. This is something actually that the PVOs are working on. Trying to develop indicators and measurements that will allow us to measure more intangible results.

Q: What kind of measurements are you thinking of?

Use of indicators in food security programs and community capacities

BRYSON: Actually, AFRICARE has been putting a lot of emphasis on trying to come up with measurements of community capacity building. Our food security manual is to help our project staff determine whether the kinds of techniques and project interventions that they are using are really working in getting the communities able to do these things for themselves. In so many cases you may be able to increase yields, for instance, during the three, four or five years that you've got the really strong technical presence of the project. But when you leave, it hasn't been internalized enough by the community to carry it on. The other thing that many, many people have had problems with, many USAID programs have had problems with, are things like digging wells and putting pumps on wells and then not having people able to keep them running. AFRICARE does a lot of work on insisting that the community says, "It's definitely a well that we need, water is a real problem, we don't have enough water to cook with, we don't have enough water to wash our hands." All those kinds of issues. "We don't have enough water to drink," and that really is one of the major constraints in food utilization. If we do put the water there we require the community to work on the well, on the construction of the well so that people understand what has to be done to maintain it. We train a committee to maintain the well. We get them to establish user charges so that they have some funds available for replacing the parts of the pump and all of this sort of thing related to capacity. In Guinea Bissau, we have been really very pleased to see the changes that are occurring among the communities.

When we first went there between having a socialist government and being an area, (Cassini), that had suffered greatly from the revolution with the Portuguese. It was the area where the Revolution had started and a lot of it had been bombed and the dikes and the rice irrigation had been destroyed. The people had fled; there was very great apathy on the part of the people in the villages. They really felt that unless the government came and did things for them they personally couldn't do anything about it. In our work with the communities, we have carried out a lot of small scale activities like road improvement, bridges, wells, those sorts of things. The communities have been required to help us with these activities and work in the program. We found in the beginning that AFRICARE had to do everything involved with the organization of the activity. But last year where 12 kilometers of road had washed out, a number of villages had gotten together on their own and planned all of the aspects of getting that road repaired. They came to AFRICARE at the end and asked if we could come up with a bit of money to put gasoline in the truck that they had borrowed from the administration to move the rocks.

So it's trying to measure that kind of activity that with those kinds of results but we have come up with a Food Security Community Capacity Index (FSCCI). Actually we included this index in our food security manual. We also put it in our Burkina Faso proposal and the reviewers were quite interested in it. They felt that there were certain modifications that we could make to make it more useful. What we were trying to do was identify certain variables of community capacity such as community organization, participation, analysis and planning and ability to take action, individual skills of community members and then we scored them. We had various variables under those such as under community organization, the number of groups and associations, the number of decisions, how participatory the leadership was, whether the general membership of the group was involved in decision-making or just the leaders, how good were the skills that they were demonstrating, the learning of various skills for planning and analysis, elaborating and carrying out of various plans and so forth.

What we were planning on doing was having this really become part of the monitoring of the project; the project staff would score the various communities that they were working with, say, on a quarterly basis. You would take something like 1 to 5, 5 being fantastic and participatory and 1 being not very participatory at all, and having them score it. Then we would have as the result the scores of the communities, say, a 70 over the time of the project expecting that maybe the index was 20 when they began. We must make modifications, but we think this sort of approach to really trying to get a hold of how well you are developing local capacity is really the heart of development. Any results that you have in the five year period or a ten year period, that you are working with a community is almost less important than whether or not you they're able to sustain that level of improvement once the project phases out.

That I think is what is really a very, very strong element of Africare's program with this emphasis. It's not always been easy to get approval for programs that allow for individual community decision making. Often the way projects are structured is that you are supposed to be putting in a certain number of wells that you have designed in advance or a certain number of bridges, a certain number of kilometers of road and so forth. To try and keep a portion of the project of the budget flexible to allow for small-scale community action is very difficult.

What we usually try to do is that in the initial year or so of the project we are collecting information in much more detail about the situation. Starting, in the design phase of the activities, we establish a fairly clear idea of the range of things that are going to be desired and that need to be done in the area. Then, the start up involves getting the communities ready to undertake the various activities. We had a visit from a gentleman from the Africa Bureau who visited programs in Chad and Mali and a proposed program in Burkina Faso. He felt that AFRICARE needed to do more sooner to deliver things to the people because the needs in the areas were so great.

The whole process of getting this community-based action going took time. Many times when he visited, some of the people - the Sultans and others who were in leadership positions in Chad - were saying that they thought that what was going to happen eventually was going to be great, but they were worrying about what they were going to eat tomorrow. I think that that is a little bit of the issue with some of the things that AFRICARE has done. On the other hand, in Guinea Bissau, for instance, when I went and visited there in, I think '93 or '94, a lot of the people in the communities were saying to me, "You know we've been getting all this training, training on how to run various things and do things, but we haven't got any credit yet. We haven't got any loans yet. This isn't like what we're used to. Whenever other groups have been involved with us they always bring us equipment and so forth."

On the other hand, the area that AFRICARE was working in was very, very remote. There were not many of those skills available and the population was very apathetic and demoralized. In the last three to four years when there had been a certain level of capacity built up we have been able to introduce a credit program and it has been operating very successfully. There really was not a lot of success that other groups had had in trying to set up credit activities in Guinea Bissau.

Q: You are saying that people want to get something tangible right away and you want them to concentrate on community capacity building?

BRYSON: I think so. I'm just speaking of my own personal opinion. I think AFRICARE could do much with FFW and some other elements of programs, particularly in places like the Ouaddai in Chad where the food is really limited. That would help to provide additional resources early on in the program.

Q: Is there a time frame when you think these people could carry out the program on their own? Five, ten, fifteen years? What kind of time frame are you talking about?

BRYSON: AFRICARE has worked, say for instance, in Guinea Bissau on having stimulated the organization of federations of associations of communities to try and develop this framework through which the kinds of resources that we have provided can continue to be sustained. This actually is something that I would personally like to study more. I have a sense that, if we were to go back and visit the communities where AFRICARE has worked in the past or to do more research and analysis of what happens with USAID programs, we would find that a lot of what happens, particularly if it happens in this sort of a context of literacy training, capacity building as part of programs; that even if you go back and you find that the exact activity that you had been working on is not operating anymore, because conditions do change, you will find that something is going on.

AFRICARE has spent a long time with a group that wanted to make soap and when they got to the point of making soap, a new road came in and there was industrial soap available from Guinea which was much cheaper than this group could make soap. So the women actually ended up trading palm oil. They were purchasing palm oil to make soap with originally. Now they are just trading palm oil, but they had the knowledge of how to organize themselves. How to prepare business plans, how to get a loan and so forth. I think we would find that in a lot of places there is something there and the overall quality of life and standard of living and resources available in the community are much greater than they would have been if there had not been any intervention from these programs.

We know things like the producers in Niger of the Tahoua onion that is between a purple and a white onion prized all over West Africa. When AFRICARE first started working on it people in the area were growing onions, but they were just growing it for their own consumption. They didn't have improved seeds. They weren't organized, knowledgeable about how to form themselves into cooperatives and reach out to traders or arrange for marketing and now today there is a huge sale in Niger onions. They go all the way to Abidjan, there are several million dollars worth of Niger onions sold each year in the market of Abidjan. I met traders in Burkina Faso who had come from Niger and gone to Abidjan with the onions, had picked up cement in Abidjan and taken it and sold it in Burkina Faso and then were going to buy mangos and oranges and take them back to Niger so they had a load for each segment of their route.

I know all of the different work that has been done. I particularly notice in the area of vegetables that USAID programs and the programs of PVOs like AFRICARE - who is always going to be working on water development and gardening over and over and over in all kinds of small projects all over the Sahel - have really made a big difference. You can see the difference if you look at statistics of the agricultural surveys that are done on what sort of crops were grown, what sort of items were included in the diet in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. You will see a big progression and a big change in the direction of many more vegetables, which is very important because vegetables are grown in the off-season in most of these places with irrigation. It means that the agricultural labor force is becoming more productive year round, but also that it provides food that fits in the seasons when food is not available; also food that has essential vitamins and minerals which were not present in the diet before. The diseases that you found there were due to the lack of iodine, the lack of other minerals. So, I really feel that these kinds of programs have made a substantial improvement.

Q: Your examples suggest it is a combination of local activity where Africare's involved with the opening up of opportunities and a large market which isn't just internal to the village.

BRYSON: The thing I do think is that you see there are many aid agencies, The World Bank and the Agency for International Development and so forth that they are specialized in doing things like financing big projects. The roads arrive, but, if you do not have the grass roots development taking place, often what happens to these communities is that - just like happened to the woman who wanted to make soap - the road brings products from places that are more developed and makes it cheaper. It's hard for the economy of the local area to respond to that and so the roads can often just extract products from these areas often at cheap prices and provide them with cheap goods. It doesn't help the economy of the area to grow itself. It is when the people in those areas have been organized, have been trained and understand business, that they can say, "I'm sorry, but I'm not going to sell you this rice at this price because I know that we can as a group hire a truck and take this rice to Bissau and can make much more of a profit on it than you are offering me." The traders have to begin to provide the people with a more reasonable price and that comes from knowledge and from a certain feeling of capacity to cope with changing circumstances. So the role of the organizations that are spending time in the grass roots is a very important complementary role to this much bigger business of creating the infrastructure.

Q: Do you find that USAID recognizes the importance of this capacity, or just saying so in principle, in terms of its new programs and the time frames required, resources available to do that?

BRYSON: I think that right now there is a lot of ambivalence in the PVO community about the reengineering process at USAID. On the one hand, we all are aware that the emphasis on results and on measuring results of trying to determine impact and all the rest of it is making valuable contributions to our programs. It actually is helpful in many ways.

Q: In what way?

BRYSON: An example, I heard was that CARE has a huge Food for Work, Cash for Work, program in Bangladesh and they have focused on the people that were working on the roads. They were largely women who were divorced and have no other support for their families. There hasn't been a lot of awareness over the years that you needed to put in culverting; you needed to put in other things to make the roads more useful. I mean the value of the roads could be increased beyond just providing food to these families.

More recently USAID has wanted to have analyses done of what impact the roads are having on the farm families around the roads. The analyses of that found that the roads were being helpful to the farm families, but the road surface that was put on it was actually detracting a lot from the value of the road. What they were doing was excavating from the ditches and putting the dirt on the road; it was mostly clay soil so the road surface during the monsoons got really muddy and tacky and just at the time that the farmers were needing to take their crops to market, the rickshaw prices were going up because of the difficulty of getting through the roads. So with this knowledge CARE is now working on figuring out ways of improving the road surface because that will have a greater overall development benefit. We can see the importance of that, and in a lot of cases the projects are indicators and the kind of results that the missions and others want is very much in terms of increasing yields, decreasing the cost of transporting goods on the road, reducing the price of agricultural inputs and that sort of thing. But, trying to get those kinds of results requires a lot of activities around the food program most of which can't really be done with food.

Issues in monetization and food aid programs

There's a lot of controversy right now over the fact that for the food programs as a whole, the amount of monetization is increasing hugely. It went along for a very long time at somewhere between 10 and 15% of the total of all programs, but in the last couple of years, it suddenly escalated to 30% and then 40%. It's 40% this year and there's some discussion that in fiscal year 1999 it may be as high as 60%.

Q: Monetization of?

BRYSON: Food commodities in the Title II Developmental Programs. I'm talking about the PVO community as a whole. Africare's programs have been 100% monetization, but the overall percentage within all the programs have been around 15% and have suddenly gone upwards. The reason it has gone upwards is because of the PVOs response to the new results framework and also to the fact that USAID completely eliminated some things like general welfare or humanitarian feeding which were things like sheltered homes for the handicapped. They said that those kinds of things were not developmental and unless there was an emergency context you could not support those sorts of groups. The PVOs have had to phase out of those kinds of activities. The kinds of activities that were approved all had results that required much more money; there really wasn't a lot of awareness of that.

There had been quite a lot of work done in the 1980s with respect to Food for Work that showed that, if you wanted to construct something, there were differing amounts of labor that could be used efficiently in different sorts of programs. Food for Work was really only providing the wage of the workers. You know, in some cases like conservation work, it might be as much as 60% of the total cost because, if you were doing things like digging holes for trees, your tree nurseries could have a lot of manual labor involved in them. In other kinds of programs like building roads, even if you were doing it with labor intensive construction, the wage only represented 35% or 40%. So you needed a lot of cash around that activity just to build a good road. Now, if you are really wanting to be sure that you are not only building a good road, but you are also seeing to it that the yields of crops around the roads go up and that the cost of agriculture inputs go down, then you are working with a whole bunch of things that take a lot more cash.

The school feeding programs have been phased out in most cases through the focusing on specific results that we were to get. This has led to a lot of concern on the part of the commodity groups in the United States, who have been supplying food for the food aid programs. The commodities such as corn, soy, bulgur wheat and so forth were in many cases factories; everything had been set up specifically to provide the food that was going into these programs. There is no longer any demand and the monetization programs are much more focused on wheat, either wheat or wheat flour or on oil. There's been a movement from oil in four liter tins to oil in barrels or bulk oil which is going to factories in countries. This means that the cardboard box manufacturers and the people who manufacture the four liter tins are finding that they don't have demand for those workers. So there have even been some threats on the part of various commodity groups to sue USAID for their loss of business.

Q: That's a different kind of result.

BRYSON: That's right. There is quite a lot of soul searching right now on how these problems can be dealt with. I feel that they are sort of inevitable. That as the economies in the countries develop, they're going to want to do more of the value added to the various things that are sold in their markets. There are many suppliers, if the U.S. is not prepared, willing to provide vegetable oil in bulk to be processed and bottled or whatever in the country. Argentina or some other country will do it. That is just inevitable.

One country that has been causing a lot of controversy is Mozambique because Mozambique previously had a huge amount of emergency food being distributed including oil in four liter tins. Since the war has been over and the people have moved back to their villages and are reestablishing their lives and there are large factories that can process vegetable oil, the Government has said, "We want to have unprocessed bulk oil and we want to process it ourselves and bottle it ourselves." Also, it becomes much more expensive for the PVOs if they were to continue trying to distribute it because people are not in the few camps, they are disbursed all over the countryside so you move to a different kind of situation. The commodity groups in the United States have to understand that the Title II Program really can't try to fly in the face of those kinds of changes. If we monetize raw vegetable oil in Mozambique that does not mean that we would otherwise be able to distribute four-liter tins because that particular requirement has disappeared. So it is not a kind of one to one thing that we're having to deal with. The PVOs have been saying to the commodity people that really they can't expect the American non-profit to make up for lack of ability of American businesses to respond to changing world conditions. We actually can be very helpful in creating an atmosphere that facilitates the American agricultural product system as time goes on, but it may not be in exactly the same form and in exactly the same way that it was during the period when countries are in crisis.

Q: You made the point many times that this monetization is such a major part of the programs that you've been managing. What were some of the major issues that you experienced in handling the monetization program since it's supposed to be such a special and important feature of your projects?

BRYSON: Monetization in general is a real problem for many people who are supporters of food aid and also for many people who are not supporters of food aid. But many of our friends have an idea that U.S. food aid is most valuable when it is actually carried all the way to the poor in developing countries; they feel that that is a necessary element of the programs. They don't understand the connection if we take the commodities and put it into the market. They can accept, perhaps, that the money can be useful in generating food security, but they talk about food as food that means that you are feeding it to people and that you are taking it to them.

Our major effort has been to educate people to the fact that food is food whether you take it all the way to individuals or whether you put it into markets. We have also contended that markets are actually efficient, that they are a more efficient form of distribution than creating a parallel system of trucking and targeting and all the rest of it and that the kind of commodities that are provided under Title II are very basic commodities. So they are very likely to increase the availability of food and to help assure that commodities reach the poorest.

Q: "Basic "meaning what?

BRYSON: You know flour, oil, sorghum and millet. By increasing the supply on the market of these commodities, it helps to keep prices at a reasonable level for consumers. This is very important, but we also had an interesting experience last week when we were talking with one of our country reps who had been working in the Sahel. He pointed out the fact that flour is generally taken and baked into bread, it's also baked into small cakes by women who set up at worksites or outside schools. He said that's one of the principal foods that people who are better off purchase and hand out to the children who come with their begging bowls.

In the Muslim countries when the families who are poor send out their children with begging bowls and ask for food and if you have the wherewithal to provide it, it is expected, it's an obligation. He said it is an easy thing to purchase. He said, "I was always doing it." It dawned on us that if AFRICARE is selling flour in Chad and it is going to the wholesalers and it goes to the retailers, it goes to the bakers, it goes to the women who are baking these cakes and then it is purchased by people who have money and it's given to the poor, a portion of this benefit gets to the poorest. So, the monetization has not only generated a series of economic activities and incomes of people of a lesser and lesser means, the women food vendors are people who tend to be poor, but it also has brought food to selected poor people. It isn't something where we've had to target them and figure out who they are but people who are self selected. It also operates within the culture of the country. So, nobody has to worry about whether the commodities are being sold or what else is happening, it's happening that way.

Then we have the money to work on the food security problems in the Ouaddai Region of Chad, which is clear across the country from the capitol city. It's probably the most landlocked spot in Africa. It's on the border with Sudan and it would be a place that would be extremely difficult to reach with American commodities in any cost effective way. What we are doing there is working with people to improve their own agriculture. We can see the benefits. We are making efforts to educate the people to the multiple benefits that actually arise from monetization. It really isn't a question of food for cash or food as food, but it's always food as food and that you are actually using food more effectively we believe when you monetize it than when you distribute it. Even if you wanted to distribute food, which an organization like Catholic Relief or others are set up to do, I think in many cases it's much more efficient and developmentally enhancing if you sell food in the urban markets at the ports or whatever and then purchase food close to the area where you are going to use it, so that you don't incur all the transport and handling costs.

Q: Purchasing locally produced food, not imported?

BRYSON: That's right, because you are going to feed children, if you are going to do any of those sorts of things, it is better to work with locally produced commodities and you don't have the transport charges, storage problems or shelf life, any of that kind of stuff. I think that that's going to be a continuing process to help people to understand the benefits of using food in this way and, of course, - I may have talked about this before - the other thing AFRICARE had brought home to us over and over again is the other kinds of developmental things that occur just by carrying out commercial processes and doing it efficiently and effectively.

Unintended benefits from food aid programs, minimizing food losses, commercialization

Q: What do you mean by that?

We just had an example today; we have a cargo of 2,000 metric tons of flour that is arriving in the Port of Douala for Chad. Before AFRICARE, other flour that had been imported into Chad (the U.S. Government used to have a Title III program), they typically had very large losses. Generally, it took them months to get the commodities up to Chad after it arrived in Douala, but AFRICARE works with the shippers, the receiving agents and with the transit people and the Government and all the rest of it to see to it that the whole movement is facilitated.

Douala was voted as the most corrupt port in the world. SOCOPA's, which is the receiving agent in Douala, attitude has been, "Well, you are just going to lose commodities, pilferage is something that we're not about to deal with. We're not about to put our lives at risk and so forth in seeing to it that commodities don't get lost." So AFRICARE went back to them and said, "Another receiving company had actually paid for security around the area, when we went back to the forwarding company and discussed with them the fact that AFRICARE was going to be in the port and that we expected that they would see to it that similar things happened. It came back and said, "All right we'll also get security, and it will cost \$1,000." This is for the movement of flour that is worth \$1.5 million and to begin to demonstrate that for relatively small amounts of money you can see to it that commodities arrive in good condition and that each step of the way things happens efficiently. We meet with the shippers, we talk to them about containerization, we work with USAID trying to improve those types of things and all of that is a demonstration about how things can be done better.

There is a recent book that has come out written by Joachim Von Braun and Patrick Webb. It's called "Famines in Africa" and there is a chapter in it about the problems of market integration and the lack of efficiency in markets and the role of that in famines. One of the things that they found was that when there was something like a 10% drop overall in the country in production, the prices in areas that were the worst off tended to increase by 200% - 300%. If markets were functioning efficiently, you wouldn't see nearly that much of a difference. So we can see the great value, for food security and for people having enough to eat, of working on these kinds of problems. We think there is no better way to do it than when you are actually working with the real thing. When you are handling the commodities, it's not a paper exercise; it's a real time exercise that works to educate everybody.

Q: Is this approach typical of other voluntary agencies, or is this an Africare specialization?

BRYSON: It is much more an AFRICARE specialization. There is a tendency to pretty much leave a lot of the arrival of commodities and so forth up to the forwarding agents and the transit agents and all the rest of it. There is a tendency among the PVOs to do that. Commercial companies do not; commercial companies who live or die on the bottom line make sure they know the number of every railcar that leaves out of the harbor, but it's not typical for PVOs, in fact a lot of them feel that this isn't their mission.

In our case, sometimes even the senior staff at AFRICARE wonder if this is our mission and when battles break out between the stevedores and the shipping and the people on the boats or whatever, not our people, but I mean the crews of ships and so forth. They say do we really want AFRICARE staff along in that kind of a situation. What we have done is to take reasonable precautions and a lot of AFRICARE staff has been in a lot of these situations. They are up there in N'gaoundere, Cameroon right now, so we think that, relatively speaking, the kinds of difficulties we get into we minimize all the risks.

Africare's staff went to a workshop in Ghana that is being organized by Catholic Relief Services. It's a workshop focused specifically on loss reduction. When we got the agenda for the workshop and looked at it, we found CRS had done a tremendous amount of work in reducing losses in terms of the bagging in the U.S. and movement along the barges in the U.S. and loading in the U.S. ports and, in fact, they managed to prove that something like 50% of all the losses were incurred on commodities which were going out of the Port of St. Charles in Louisiana. That one port was responsible for a huge amount of losses.

There was nothing on the agenda about minimizing losses in transiting the ports in Africa. We pointed this out to them and said, "You know we have some methodologies for that," and they said, "Oh that would be great would you guys come?" We said, "Well, can you pay for us to come? They said, "No, we don't have any money for that. We could give you lunch." So we said we knew that USDA were the people that was funding CRS's workshop and so we just gave them a proposal for Africare's staff to go to the workshop and they're funding it. They are aware; we have been going to meetings in Kansas City and all the rest of it. USDA really is very aggressive about the business of efficiency in the ports and minimizing losses when you get to the country.

Q: Is this view is general knowledge, it would seem to me that USAID, USDA and Congress all would say this is what we should be doing?

BRYSON: They would agree with that. Whether the commodities were going to be sold or whether they were going to be distributed, that's what they want to have happen and actually even though the PVOs don't typically go to the ports, the losses of commodities of American PVOs in the ports are actually far less than those of the World Food Program and generally far less than USAID had when they were doing Title III.

Q: I was thinking not just as a port operation but the whole commercialization, monetization process all the way down the line. The markets are more efficient; all the things you were describing.

BRYSON: The problems arise because the commodity groups in the United States are extremely powerful and they do not all speak with one voice. They have a number of different Congress persons who answer for parts of the commodity interest and sometimes the same company. Because they are multi-national companies, it will be another division which is operating as if it was an independent company who is complaining about what the PVOs are doing when actually their company in the United States are selling to the PVOs to do whatever we're doing and they are selling to the U.S. Government for the same thing.

Apparently a cargo broker, who probably would not have been selling American wheat to this buyer in Egypt, caused the problem in Egypt; they would have probably sold wheat from a nearby location and would have gotten their interest on it. We know that the PVOs have got to operate very closely with the commodity groups and be very transparent in what they're doing. It's not possible to make all the people happy all the time because their interests are not synonymous. That is part of it. The other part is just that there is such a tremendous belief that food is something that Americans produce a lot of and that we should use it to feed the world and that we can feed the world by actually having a distribution activity. So, it's going to be a long process, I think, to bring people around. It is an inevitable process. The world is becoming more and more monetized. Money was developed in Mesopotamia in 4000 BC. One can't necessarily expect the Africans will be interested in working on a barter system in 2000 AD.

Q: It's obsolete.

BRYSON: That's right. Its cost-effectiveness in production and everything else depends upon being able to smoothly transfer commodities. The other thing that I think is really important about our continuing to emphasize this program and continuing to assure support for monetization is the fact that there is very, very limited other resources for agricultural development funding.

I went to a session that was organized by the International Food Policy Research Institute in December of '98. They have this series called the 20/20 vision series where they are trying to look into the future with respect to a whole variety of issues surrounding food. On this particular day they were presenting research that IFPRI had done on the impact of foreign assistance on agriculture. They were showing that foreign assistance for agricultural development was a win, win proposition. That for every dollar that incomes increased in the agricultural sector, incomes in the total economy increased by \$2.50. That was including the dollar; it was a total of \$3.50, but a total of \$2.50 because the multiplier effects of what happened with food, having this additional income was so strong within the economy.

The other thing that was very interesting was that that same dollar of additional effort within the agricultural sector resulted in \$.73 worth of new imports of which \$.17 was agricultural products. This is something that is very well understood by the American commodity groups. They don't have any problem at all about this. They are aware that the green revolution in Asia resulted in far more imports of American food to Asia even though the Asians were producing more themselves at increasing and amazing rates.

The American commodity groups don't have any problems with this, but where the problem arises is the fact that USAID's funding to promote agricultural development has crashed. In that same session, they showed that there was only 50% as much foreign aid money going into agricultural development as was going into it a decade ago.

Q: I'm sure that's true.

BRYSON: This was universal, all donors. However, the European donors were beginning to recognize that this was not the way to go and they were turning around, but USAID was not. A number of USAID people who encouraged investing in agricultural development got beaten up on. They felt they had to explain a little bit what was happening. They said the problem that USAID faced was that the American USAID budget is very heavily focused on a very few countries and then what remains after that is heavily earmarked for child survival and certain other things are earmarked so when you come down to what is actually free money to try to do anything it's very, very limited. We just don't have the capacity to do that. This is where the PVO programs are really important because of the PVO Title II program. Because there is something like 400,000,000 dollars worth of developmental food aid, and of that, a good portion is going into agricultural productivity enhancing activities. I asked the IFPRI people if they had taken into account what the PVOs were spending in this program in their analysis and they said, "No, they didn't know that those figures were available." They are easily available because of the results reporting process.

Actually there are a couple of things that I'd really like to look at. One thing I'd like to find out what that is; we can do that quite simply because the Food Aid Management Project (FAM) has all of the documentation for the projects. The other thing that I think about is that I also think that there may be something about this monetization. Where they say that when there is an additional amount of income generated in the agricultural sector, it causes an additional \$2.50 in the whole economy. I suspect that providing food rather than money may do something similar. As I mentioned earlier about the different people that were involved in the chain of purchasing the flour and making the cakes and all the rest of it, there is this benefit to the economies. I think that that is something to consider in terms of development questions.

Some lessons from Africare's food security programs

Q: Let's back up and take a bigger perspective about food security and what you see as some of the central lessons or characteristics of an effective food security program - a summation of some of the key points.

BRYSON: I do believe, that sort of a fluke generated all of the thinking that has gone on about food security. The PVOs were concerned that some term that really related to food be included in the language of the purpose for the PVO legislation, because the language that had been in the law up until 1990 had been interpreted that relief commodities were really intended to foster the political agenda of the United States. In 1990 the language changed and it was very much at the initiative of the PVOs that this happened. Re the legislation, it was very much a PVO initiative to have food security written into the law so it now says that the purpose of PL 480 is to foster the food security of the developing world. So then everybody had to start thinking of what was meant by food security. It took the USAID Food Aid Office a couple of years to come out with a policy determination on food security. That determination which stated that food security was when all people at all times have sufficient food to lead a healthy and productive life and that it was broken down into three areas: the availability of food, access to food and utilization of food. All three of those conditions really had to be present for food security to occur, and I think that has caused all of us to go back to the drawing board and think about what we are doing.

At AFRICARE we've had three workshops in which we got together almost everybody in the organization to sort of reflect on those aspects of food security and we basically came to a decision that this definition actually indicated that food security was something that you would always be aspiring for, that no country in the world was really food secure on those terms for all people at all times. Various things intercede to keep it from happening, but it's an aim that you're working towards.

The second thing we felt was that Africare's mission of working for agricultural development, water development, health services, natural resource management in Africa was very closely aligned with the various aspects of food security. There was another factor that has been extremely important. That was the USAID re-engineering process which all of us have screamed about and moaned about and wailed about. But having to come to a determination of what it was in impact terms: what you were trying to achieve, and then how you measure what is happening is really beginning to pay dividends.

Q: In what way?

BRYSON: With the quality of programs and also in helping us understand exactly what is happening with our activities. We have been very gratified, as we have gone through doing our results reports, to see really how much is really happening in the various projects.

Q: What do you mean by really happening? For example.

BRYSON: In Mozambique, because the impact is to occur both in terms of incomes of households from producing more sunflower and sesame seed and oil and incomes of people who invest in presses and this sort of thing. There are indicators that have to do with how much more the yields are and the total production of sunflower seed is. We know that Africare's program has resulted in a huge increase in production in the area and that this is really having a major impact on the incomes of families. So we are in a much better position to say that this is a good investment for the U.S. Government. But also because we have this data to work with and analyze when we come to do our evaluations, we can come to a conclusion about what needs to be done to improve it. I know that AFRICARE in its work in the African continent over 25 years has caused some rather major things to happen.

If you talk to people like Dr. Kennedy or Miss Harper - they go back to the early days of what AFRICARE was doing - for instance, there are the very famous onions that come from Niger. At this point in time that particular area of Niger produces huge amounts of onions and they are well known for the quality of their onions. They sell millions of dollars worth of onions to Abidjan and various other cities from that area. Miss Harper says that when AFRICARE first went there women were growing onions, but AFRICARE did a lot of work with them on improved varieties and on organizing themselves into cooperatives and how to become efficient marketers and all that sort of thing. AFRICARE probably had a very substantial impact on what has become something that is lucrative.

AFRICARE also has consistently across the whole continent worked on water development with vegetable production. If you look at the agricultural surveys for the '70s, '80s and 90s you will see again that there has been a continuous progression in vegetable production that is growing in importance. How much of that has derived from activities of this organization is very hard to tell and the same is true with what USAID did and everybody else did, because there really wasn't sufficient careful data collection and analysis. There were base lines and that kind of thing. A lot of them tended to be very antidotal and not as much attention paid to what happened. Except in a few cases like say the Danfa Health Research project in Ghana where there were many, many experts.

I think one thing that is really important is that with these data systems, we are working to make them as user friendly as possible and to create having computer back up, taking the data which is collected from all the different sources within projects and taking it back to the community. You know we have in all our projects community based information systems where the people in the community can see what is happening as a result of the activities they are undertaking to improve their food security such as keeping track of how children's weights are changing and all of that sort of thing, as well as what is happening with their agricultural productivity activities in terms of improved yields, or reduction in storage losses. We go through with them; we use this process of having appraisals and then analyzing them together with the community and then determining what action is going to be taken. This is an on-going process. This is really important for the capacity of communities to sustain their food security improvements after the project phases out.

Again it's only when you have the data and you're clear about what you are trying to achieve in terms of impact that you have the information to carry out that kind of a process effectively. I think there's always going to be a role for sharing of ideas. In some cases, as USAID has been doing, they have had certain programs where they got ideas back that had really risen within development projects overseas and have disseminated the information here to address problems in America.

Lessons for new food security projects

Q: If you continue to design new food security projects, what are the five things you would address to be sure the project was a well thought through ?

BRYSON: First of all, if you look at the definition of food security, unless you have malnutrition in an area you don't have a food security problem. Because the ultimate output is a healthy and productive life. So you really need to look at the question of what is the nutrition status of people in an area.

Q: So the projects are focused on areas where there is malnutrition?

BRYSON: That's right.

Q: That's how you select the area?

BRYSON: Then the next part is to determine what is causing that malnutrition. Whether the malnutrition is being caused by a poor water supply that is causing people to have continuous diarrhea, whether it's caused by a lack of food availability, whether it's caused by low incomes, may be there is food around but these people can't buy it. You need to analyze.

Q: The crisis?

BRYSON: Yes, it could be a long-term crisis complicated by drought and other difficulties. It's really working your way down through the chain of causality. AFRICARE has produced a manual for our design, implementation and evaluation of food security projects that starts out with this food security framework beginning with the malnutrition problem and working down from that.

Q: What's the next step?

BRYSON: The next step is then to determine what are the most critical determinants of food insecurity in the area and focus on those in determining what your project of activities are going to be. I think it is very important as you are going about this conceptualization that you include data collection such as rapid rural appraisals so that you really have input from the local communities. That you are not coming in with ideas from elsewhere and trying to impose them on that particular environment but rather look at what is causing these things to happen in this place. There may be plenty of food around but there are customs, the people don't eat that food. So how do you make a change that is acceptable?

Q: How do you make a project that works?

BRYSON: Well, we know that from long experience the problems are going to occur in all three areas: availability, access and utilization. We do have difficulty often with USAID because it's going to be very hard particularly in the African context to get to a state of food security without impacting on agricultural production as well as food utilization. USAID is often concerned that our projects are too complicated, too many interventions and this is further complicated because AFRICARE also works with each community and communities have very individual circumstances. So when we start trying to explain what we intend to do, it looks as if we're all over the map.

In actual fact we do have a methodology which is fairly straightforward and which involves going into the communities and carrying out an action planning process with them. The action planning process inevitably comes up with the fact that there is a need to enhance the productivity of what they are doing in agriculture and that there is a set of interventions which AFRICARE has done over and over and over and over such as bringing in improved seeds, working on water sources, fencing in fields with living fences so the animals don't walk over them except when you want them to and planting wind breaks. All of these sorts of things are pretty standard in our programs. The other side of it is that there needs to be a system in place in the community where people can keep track of the condition of children and to understand that when they feed children certain foods in the right quantities and according to a certain schedule, their children will grow better and stronger. Again, those programs are things that we have done over and over for a very long time.

Q: You must get to some point where AFRICARE can't stay on, the assistance is ending. Food security is not when you arrive at some point and you've done it; it's a continuing issue that needs to be addressed. What do you do to get to the point where AFRICARE doesn't have to be the one that is always there trying to keep the program going?

BRYSON: Basically, AFRICARE does try to create sustainability and to move on. At the present time and probably for the foreseeable future for at least the next decade, there's going to be other places that need help. AFRICARE has always worked for sustainability. I was very interested to hear at this presentation that I went to last week where USAID had all of the different - ISAMs, these are the Institutional Support Agreement Managers - present what they were going to do with their new grants. To hear the Catholic Relief Services person say that they were going to continue to work on their methodology for wage based food assisted child survival programs. One of their primary interests was to create sustainability within a five year period in communities so they can move on to other communities.

Back in 1983 I headed up an assessment/redesign of the Catholic Relief Services program in Indonesia. The team consisted of myself and an anthropologist and a Filipino woman and an Australian woman who were working for a local nutrition and another Catholic institution. We had come up with a proposal at that time for helping each community to become self-sufficient within a five-year period. We had run up against just almost complete opposition of Father Capone who was a well known person working for Catholic Relief Services at that time who stated that "Catholic Relief Services mission was to serve the poor wherever they are for as long as they need help and that you can't kind of try to impose a five year limit on it." The two women who were working on it who were hired locally were terribly upset by this because they felt it was a very patronizing attitude and that there were ways because we had proposed a credit program where we said while the women were getting additional food for their young children it's the same as money. You can give them opportunities to save and that those opportunities to save can actually over time generate the conditions whereby they can improve their families income but there's also a bit of the interest they pay can be set aside to support nutrition activities in the village. The people at the Catholic Relief Office in Indonesia said "Don't worry about it guys, we understand and we will implement what you are proposing" which they did. It did have a very major impact over time on those programs. In fact Catholic Relief Services eventually moved almost to 100% credit activities in Java.

Q: I'm thinking about AFRICARE's projects when you are working with a community; is there some point where you can say we'll move on to another community, as there are many communities who need a new program. Can you say we're done; this one is on its own, now we don't need to continue?

BRYSON: Yes.

Q: Have you found how you reach that point?

BRYSON: I think AFRICARE has a lot in its programs. The food programs are so new relatively speaking. We have don't have any examples yet where we have phased out of areas. For example, in Ouaddai in Chad, AFRICARE is in this particular program proposing to work on agricultural productivity enhancing things such as drying vegetables and all of this sort of thing which AFRICARE has done in the past in the Sahel. We have this whole project where we worked on developing the techniques for sun drying tomatoes and then we found that if you sun dried the tomatoes and put them in jute sacks and sent them to N'jamana when they arrived you just had a truck full of tomato dust. So instead we got a mill to mill the dried tomatoes and put the tomatoes in plastic which then increased the income of the farmers by 30% on those tomatoes. We set that mill up and we ran it together with a local cooperative. AFRICARE phased out of that program three years ago and sold the mill to the cooperative; they're paying us back for it on a five-year loan. They are continuing to operate and the activity has grown. So in this new project we are looking at other vegetables so we don't disturb that activity, but we know that the kind of techniques that we used can be effective.

Q: What's the opportunity for generalizing this because people are always saying, well that's very nice, that's a little area you've done well in that place, but even though it's done well how do you generalize the experience to get a broader impact in countries where the need is so great?

BRYSON: I would say, for instance, in Mozambique, if you look at our data we have on our baseline, we tend to think of the Sahel as being the place where people are the worst off. In the case of the Sahel, the stunting rates that we have in children is somewhere between 25 and 29% which, of course, is very, very bad. It shows that upwards to 30% of children has chronic severe malnutrition. But in our area in Mozambique it's 50%. It's really, really bad and the total program of all the PVOs in Mozambique is \$17,000,000 a year for five years. This is all being financed out of food monetization with a very limited amount of dollar resources. A very significant part of the poorest areas in the country are being covered by all of the different PVOs working together and many of us have complementary activities.

AFRICARE, Food for the Hungry and CARE are all working on oil production consumption. They actually set up kind of a working group of oil producers that includes local small-scale producers. It includes the large oil refiners and the Ministry of Agriculture, the seed people. So that for problems that occur in various parts of this activity, there is a regular working group that is thinking about bringing resources to bear on it. In that kind of a context I think that we can get to a significant level of improvement and especially if you are constantly going in with this approach that we are not going to be in this village and this community for ever. That we're here for a five year period of time and that during that five years we will work with you, we will train people in your community to be leaders, we will train people in your community who can provide basic health services. We train the people the village nominates so it's their people. Usually it turns out that those people have been providing health either with traditional medicine or at sometime or other the Ministry of Health Office has trained them in something and so with nobody else around they are it. We have to upgrade their skills. We give them informational, education, communication techniques and so forth. That can over time really result in the communities being able to bring themselves up.

Like in Guinea, where AFRICARE is doing this community based information system, the 3A approach. That was the national policy of the Ministry of Health because the Ministry of Health had recognized that they were never going to be able - maybe not never but it's going to be a very long time before the Ministry of Health is going - to be sure that there are adequate health services available for all the communities in Guinea. So the community has to have the strength to carry this thing out. The same is true of education; the same is true of the Ministry of Agriculture and all the rest of them. There aren't the extension agents; there isn't the staff to do those things. So what AFRICARE has done is - though this was the national policy, nobody really had a very good idea of about how to actually make it work - to find some consultants and work on some methodology and adapt some stuff that AFRICARE had done in other places. We spent a lot of time in the beginning training the local government people to this perspective and how they could be facilitators of a process rather than doers. When we went into the communities, we described to them what the project was prepared to do.

The team that visited the communities included people from all these ministries as well as the Ministry of Health and as well as the AFRICARE staff who were all Guineans with the exception of the project coordinator. The process of running the project even is generating a sustainability capacity. We didn't encourage the villages to set up a food security committee or a health committee, we encouraged them to set up a development committee which would work on general problems. We said the project is prepared to help you with your food security problems that are what we have the resources to do. That we have the people from the Ministry of Education there, so if you're wanting to try to do something about schools, these are the people that you need to contact. Helping to make those kinds of connections within the society itself. We have found that we were working in 16 communities for 18 months; we're in 32 overall, these are actually districts, there are 60 villages involved.

Q: How many people?

BRYSON: In the first 16 villages, there are 26,000 people, but five of those villages have actually carried out other activities like road repair, tree planting and so forth - not that our part of the project had anything to do with that. At the same time they were carrying out the project . So I think this general approach is very critical, if we are going to get to a position where AFRICARE doesn't have to stay to have things to continue to happen.

I have been quite amazed at what happens when you approach the activities in this way. We've had a lot of trouble with USAID because often for the first 12 months it doesn't seem like anything is happening and you actually don't spend very much money and because you are going through this whole information collection, community organization, planning the activity and so forth. But once it starts rolling, it really moves very rapidly and you can go from 26,000 people to 52,000 people to 75,000 people year by year over the course of a project. It can really be very significant. In that particular project in Dingeraiye the expat has left. The person who is in charge is now a Guinean doctor.

Q: And the Government is supportive of this?

BRYSON: The Government's very supportive. So I would say that certainly the total involvement of the community in all aspects of the activity is another thing that is really critical for a well-conceived project.

Q: Do you find all the communities are always responsive? I mean their local politics, their local cultures respond to this?

BRYSON: That is another one of the reasons why it is very helpful. AFRICARE is doing rapid rural appraisals prior to baselines and then doing baselines and then going back to communities and doing participatory rural appraisals once they have a clear idea of the situation in the area. Part of what you do in that process is to determine whether this community is at the stage where it really can relate to the activity. If there is too much dissension for instance, if there is a big political battle going on between different factions in the community, you may not be able to help them with this project.

On the other hand, a lot of the kind of skills that we're working on are government civic action kinds of things, how do you run a meeting, how do you establish and get a committee to function, how do you involve people in decision making. That is one of the things that we are really pioneering. There is some real skepticism about whether or not it will work, but we have actually created this thing called the Food Security Community Capacity Index and what we are trying to do is quantify qualitative skills. So what the index has done is to rate a community on ten different things - is decision making participatory, how effective are they in carrying out their activities, and so you give them a grade between one and five.

The people who are working with the communities are observing as they're going around and quarterly they kind of talk this up and say, "Well it looks to us like this community is a 15 and this community is a 25." So what we are seeing in terms of our impact measurement is we expect that most of the communities that we find are going to be 15s or 10s when they started, we want them to be 40s.

Q: So it involves more than food security, it's across the whole range of development activity.

BRYSON: The people who are more sociological and anthropological in USAID in their approach are very interested in this and I think that there will be other experiments by other organizations to try and get a handle on this. It's something that is really critical to the future of Africa, that doing this kind of work that is as President Kennedy said, "A long twilight struggle." You have to have infinite patience to work household-by-household, community-by-community, tribe-by-tribe, region-by-region, whatever in beginning to create the skills of cohesiveness. The Africans have their own and had their own approaches with the slave trade and the impact of the slave trade and followed that by colonialism that split across tribes and all the rest of it. People were forced to respond to completely different kinds of governmental mechanisms. There is just the residue of that whole experience is what we are seeing with the continued battles and problems. There just is a great need for these kinds of skills to address all kinds of problems.

We had a visit from Vivian Derek who is the Head of the African Bureau, and she said that one of the things the African Bureau was thinking about was establishing a unit to work on conflict resolution and conflict resolution skills. Actually it was something that Mr. Lucas has been talking about also that we need to create here within AFRICARE. A lot of what we do in trying to help people have more food security, food security and water and all those kinds of things are often at the root of conflict.

AFRICARE has just had a very successful program in the Agadez area of Niger where the people there, the Tuaregs, had been in rebellion against the government for a number of years. They signed a peace accord with the government a few years ago, but war was just about to break out again because the people felt that the government wasn't delivering on the promises in the peace accord. AFRICARE was able to go in there - we had already been working in that area - and deliver a whole set of rapid action programs. We did things like 150 wells, 545 hectares of irrigated agriculture, trained 600 people in skills so that there was something like 300,000 people in that area that were touched in one way or another by all of these different programs that we did.

It helped to settle down the problems because people had much more hope. Actually what we hope to do in the new program that we are proposing for Niger is to build on the investment that was made in that activity to come up with more long term sustained improvement in food security in that area.

Building societies at the grassroots - "Development is founded on people"

Q: What you are talking about is an approach on how to build a civil society at the grass roots with the capacity to address their own problems and to deal with each other but with a sense of hope because they have a chance to change the results.

BRYSON: I think that that is one of the things that is really important about the new results framework. If you do it right and if you let the communities in on what is being achieved, they can also see improvements. You know the old saying about you have to drive stakes to see someone move; in a sense that is what this is. Development is a very small movement upwards and if you don't have those stakes planted in the ground, people can often feel very depressed.

Q: This is a very interesting point to end on. It comes back to the philosophy and approach for getting at the grass root problems of African development. The question now is can these approaches and concepts be generalized and disseminated so they become known within the African Governments; so that they can be applied more consistently across the board. Do you see a pattern of that kind?

BRYSON: Yes, I am not one of those who are cynical about the future of Africa. I think Africa is a very wealthy continent both in its people, its traditions and its resources.

Q: Are the governments and the donors beginning to recognize these approaches as being essential or are they still operating in their old patterns?

BRYSON: No, I don't think so. I think that just as the Ministry of Health in Guinea has this approach as its policy, there are just any number of new methodologies that are coming out that different people are trying in different places. UNICEF has done a lot of work. Basically there is a tremendous amount of foreign capital in the whole business of how do you do development in a way that is effective and sustainable. I do feel that in earlier decades there was a tremendous amount of arrogance concerning Western approaches to doing things.

Probably one of the reasons why I didn't stay with USAID was because I tended to be the kind of a person who really felt that there were other levels at which I wanted to work. When you are working in a development agency you tend to be very far removed from the communities. I never actually have been able to be in the field running a project but during all the years that I worked as a consultant I was always working right on the development problems, visiting and going back and evaluating and so forth. I think there is a much greater understanding now that the diversity of human culture and approaches to things is tremendously valuable to all of us. Just as biodiversity is important, cultural diversity is important. The most effective ways of fostering advancement is to do it with the culture rather than against the culture. I think that if you read like "World Bank Publications" and things that come out, there has been a whole progression in their thinking, putting people first, basic needs, and all of those kinds of approaches that have been developed over the decades. It has been a progression in the direction of understanding that development is founded on people; it's not something that's way up here but really down with the individual person. It goes up from there rather than down to there.

Q: I think that is an excellent point on which to end this interview.

Highlights of final years at AFRICARE - 1998

Q Would you provide a short summary of the highlights of your final years at AFRICARE?

During my final years at AFRICARE there were three things I would like to discuss. One was the preparation of the USAID Food for Peace (FFP) Strategy for FY 2004-2008. The second was the continued efforts to measure adequate provisioning for households and food security community capacity. The final one was the development and introduction of the Vita Goat technology.

During the last 18 months I was at AFRICARE, USAID FFP was working on their strategy. It was a very collaborative process as they had PVO staff working on the various committees preparing the different aspects of the draft. Work on the strategy is related to the measure work as both Africare's principal measurements of Food Security (other than anthropometry of young children which is related to the utilization aspect) were incorporated into the Strategy as were the objectives they related to. This was a major step forward for AFRICARE as the food security community capacity index (FSCCI) was a measure we had continued to work on even though we had been required by FFP to take the capacity building objective out of our Development Assistance Programs as they did not have such an objective in their previous strategy so we really didn't need to measure it. That they came to recognize its importance and placed it in their own strategy was a considerable victory for us.

Finally, the Vita Goat. Our work on the technology grew out of our collaboration with the World Initiative of Soy in Human Health (WISHH) of the American Soybean Association (ASA). AFRICARE had been interested in helping farmers to add value to their soy crop and also to have more healthy foods to eat in their homes and communities. AFRICARE was able to establish a number of pilot activities around Africa, using the Vita Cow that is an electric powered version of the Vita Goat. These activities were carried out with the support of Malnutrition Matters a Canadian nonprofit that was provided to AFRICARE by WISHH. The success of the pilots was very variable, but a major problem was the cost and unreliability of electricity. So AFRICARE agreed to work on the Vita Goat project with Malnutrition Matters. They designed the equipment and had it built. AFRICARE identified three locations where there was a budget to install the equipment. We have found that the Vita Goat equipment is very versatile. While the Vita Cow equipment is dedicated to processing soy milk and soy dairy products, the Vita Goat can be used for that but also for many other items such as corn flour, soy flour and also for crushing nuts such as the shea nut. This makes the equipment far more valuable to the group that is using it.

The three pilots have gone very well. In one location, Guinea, they have purchased two more machines and are waiting for the Benin Songhai Centre to have others for sale. The technology transfer to Benin has gone very well, with the Centre having already produced one set of the equipment for display. It is hoped that we will soon be able to purchase equipment from that site as it is much less expensive than the Vita Goats made in Canada and transport costs will also be much less. What needs to be done now is to arrange for a technology transfer to South Africa and somewhere in East Africa so the equipment can be made in locations close to those countries. These sites are also English speaking which will be helpful for servicing the equipment. I think that pretty much completes the summary of where we are right now.

End of interview